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EPIC EXCLUSIVE

# KING OF THE HILL

## JURASSIC WORLD EVOLUTION

WHY THIS IS THE MOST EXCITING SIM IN A GENERATION

## A NEW MOBILE REVOLUTION

BANDAI NAMCO BRINGS ANIME POWER TO SMARTPHONES

**The future of FORTNITE and how it will conquer the world**

## HIGHLIGHTS

STATE OF DECAY 2 ■ SEA OF THIEVES ■ MOSS
YAKUZA 6 ■ FAR CRY 5 ■ SOULCALIBUR VI
INTO THE BREACH ■ KIRBY STAR ALLIES
NI NO KUNI II: REVENANT KINGDOM

## LIONHEAD LIVES

Find out how the spirit of Fable goes on in Kynseed

## KNIGHTS AND BIKES

Exclusive access to the stunning indie RPG




ISSUE 199

Gaming phenomenons seem to be emerging in the most unlikely ways. Perhaps they always did, and that's why I regard them as phenomenons rather than run-of-the-mill blockbuster releases. And perhaps a massive hit emerging from the house of Unreal and Gears Of War shouldn't surprise me, but Epic Games isn't the developer it used to be, and *Fortnite* isn't a normal game.

Following in the footsteps of *Minecraft*, *League Of Legends* and most recently its oft-compared stablemate in the shooter arena, *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, *Fortnite* represents the current state of the games industry in many interesting ways, which I can perceive as good or bad depending on whether I've had breakfast when you ask me.

As an Early Access launch, it seemed to represent the kind of half-measure development commitment that so many titles adopt in the hopes of finding their feet. A half game without a clear sense of what it wants to be, hoping that the gaming public will tell it where to head. Then it jumped on a battle royale bandwagon, beating *PUBG* to console, and for free no less. A cheap move? Maybe. An effective advertisement for a still in-progress experience? Definitely.

But now *Fortnite* is without question a huge success, and while it may not be 'finished' in the old sense we understood from an entertainment product, it represents the very best of what an early access approach can give a game. The gradual polishing and evolution of *Fortnite* into the game you can play today is impressive, but also perhaps enlightening to how things could emerge in the future. Epic has turned itself into a nimble, player-driven game-maker, and *Fortnite* is an extraordinary example of a new age of game development. Then again, maybe I'm just prone to seeing the future of the industry around every corner. We'll explore that possibility another time.

For now, I hope you enjoy issue 199. I guess that means something big might be happening next issue.

Jon Gordon

**Jonathan Gordon**
EDITOR

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COMING SOON
Groke
GAME
G-BIKE


THE END
ARCADE
199
MISSILE

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30 Feature

# FORNITE AND THE REBIRTH OF EPIC

**We sit down with Tim Sweeney, Kim Libreri and Eric Williamson to find out how the Gears Of War maker has completely overhauled itself and what that means for the future of its breakout shooter hit**

**PHOTO CREDIT** The excellent photos in the "What's Next For Chucklefish?" feature in games™ 197 were the work of Gareth Dutton and were to be accredited as such. Our apologies to Gareth for the oversight. You can see more of his work at **www.garethdutton.com**



# STATE OF DECAY 2 IS THE ULTIMATE APOCALYPSE SURVIVAL SIMULATION

→ HOME IMPROVEMENT AND EASY LIVING AT THE END OF THE WORLD

FORMAT: **PC, XBOX ONE** | PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS**
DEVELOPER: **UNDEAD LABS** | RELEASE: **22 MAY 2018** | PLAYERS: **1-4**

**It's often the plight of the people – the exploration of life and death in our most desperate hours of need – that make for the best survival stories.** Videogames have often struggled in leveraging the undead as a central antagonist in these fraught settings, with most failing to recognise that it's the people, rather than the rotting sacks of meat, that should be at the heart of these experiences. That's been true ever since the arrival of *Dead Rising* at the turn of the last generation; Capcom's near-comedic obsession with volume and violence, on raw numbers and abject body horror, had a habit of getting in the way of nuanced storytelling – an element of its design that filtered out across all those that would follow in its footsteps.

If the idea has been to merely evoke a sense of distress from players by presenting them with seemingly impossible odds for survival – to excite by providing an inordinate array of opportunities to hack, slash and shoot their way to victory – then the likes of *Dead Rising*, *Dead Island* and *Dying Light* have certainly done a good enough job with the basics of zombie-infused fiction. While these experiences are fun, it's impossible to escape the pervading fear that games should be able to offer more when dealing with the subject matter. Perhaps that's why Undead Labs' *State Of Decay* has so much appeal. In spite of its flaws, the 2013 XBLA release found great success in pulling the spotlight away from the shambling horrors that wander the wilds of small town America and focused it squarely on the survivors themselves. In amongst all of the chaos, it was your guidance and keen acumen for survival that would ultimately set the experience apart from the pack, giving you the scope and freedom to help a band of ill-equipped misfits fight to see another day. *State Of Decay* was less concerned with combat and far more interested in letting you carve out your own little slice of normality between the hordes of gnashing teeth and rotting flesh.

It may not surprise you, then, to learn that *State Of Decay 2* is more of the same – though given how many hundreds of hours we've sunk into the original in the last five years that's certainly no bad thing. At its heart, *State Of Decay 2* draws more inspiration from *The Walking Dead* (the comic books and early seasons of the AMC show) than any of its contemporaries. That means that managing resources, maintaining fraught relationships and minimalising damage to patches of claimed real estate are the crux of the experience. Smashing skulls is but a small part of the appeal to *State Of Decay 2*; come for the violence, stay for the micro-management. Ensuring the survival of your group and settlements is a powerful hook – the spectre of permadeath and a pervading fear of failure guiding you from one hour to the next.

If that doesn't sound wholly enthralling to you then there's a fairly good chance that you won't like *State Of Decay 2* all that much. Undead Labs is presenting a sequel in the traditional sense here. You shouldn't expect to find any major revisions to the core play, nor should you expect to see any of the complexity removed from its core systems; the studio has merely built upon the foundations first established by the original in an attempt to create a broader and more all-encompassing experience. *State Of Decay 2* doubles down on what made the original so beloved, taking steps to exorcise some of its demons (in particular, »

**IN BRIEF**
*State Of Decay 2* is an action-survival game featuring four-player co-op and an gorgeous open world setting



its notorious jank) and deliver highly requested features from the community.

These take form in both the micro and the macro. For example, the day/night cycle has been ever-so-slightly altered to ensure that the night-time now runs a little longer, with the colour palette of the world altered in such a way that you can never see more than a few feet in front of you – the setting of the sun a very real visual indicator that the difficulty is about to spike in a fairly punishing fashion. These, in the grand scheme of things, are small changes; whereas the addition of four-player co-op multiplayer, removal of offline/real-time progression tracking, and the implementation of a Blood Plague virus that can spread amongst your group of accrued survivors (and completely ravage them, should it be left unchecked) bring just enough changes to the formula to help convince any series veterans to jump back into the stress and joy that is now associated with the *State Of Decay* experience.




*State Of Decay 2* has received a huge visual upgrade, it looks fantastic on PC and Xbox One X.

Much of these changes stem from the studio opting to leave CryEngine 3.1 behind in favour of Epic's Unreal Engine 4. That is to say then, that Undead Labs is delivering a streamlined experience in *State Of Decay 2*; it's prettier, it's better optimised and, yes, that four-player co-op really does help deliver the fantasy of being trapped in the ultimate in apocalypse survival simulation. A solid 30 frames-per second framerate and a beautiful 4K graphical presentation (for you PC owners, at the very least; Microsoft is still yet to confirm the Xbox One X enhancements) are welcomed additions, but the best aspects to *State Of Decay 2* are happening behind the scenes.

It's the base building, in particular, that has once again caught our attention. Undead Labs has completely overhauled its UX design to better allow for easy micro-management and quick alterations to your plots of land without compromising any of its depth. Essential resources can be generated by installing fuel, power and water outposts into specific plots in your HQ, while your base can be further improved with modifications – such as upgrade stations to improve your weaponry or the installation of game consoles to help improve morale – that will help get your survivors prepared for the inevitable assaults from the encroaching hordes. There's an almost daunting level of detail to each of these systems, though *State Of Decay 2* handily breaks each of these resource metrics down in an easy to parse menu presentation to ensure that you're never left confused as to why your facilities aren't running at optimum capacity.

These are slight but important changes. The settlements and plots of land to build upon are bigger than ever. The characters you rescue and recruit are now procedurally generated – each coming equipped with their own skills, strengths, weaknesses and attributes – adding yet another layer of complexity to play. It's changes such as this that make *State Of Decay 2* feel closer to Undead Labs' original pitch from the turn of the decade. This isn't another hack and slash zombie game, it's a survival-simulator that wants to test your ability to survive at the end of the world. It's about the management of people and resources, about trying to push your luck and break new ground while dealing with elements such as exhaustion, hunger and thirst of those that have entrusted their lives to you.

Combine all of this with some smart tweaks to the third-person combat mechanics, more attention to detail paid to mission design, and an overall structure that feels more befitting of the survival focus of this sequel and *State Of Decay 2* is quietly looking like an absolutely killer prospect from Microsoft. Undead Labs has taken steps to improve optimisation and answer many of the questions and concerns raised by the community over the years, while still improving the depth and connectivity of its RPG systems and multiplayer functionality. Regardless of whether you're an Xbox One or Windows 10 gamer, you'll want to be downloading *State Of Decay 2* come 22 May 2018.



Above: *State Of Decay 2* finally introduces four-player online co-op. Right: Try to explore during the daytime, it's dangerous at night.

Right: Undead Labs has put a huge emphasis on creating your own resources for survival this time, such as farming.





"IT DELIVERS THE FANTASY OF BEING TRAPPED IN THE ULTIMATE IN APOCALYPSE SURVIVAL SIMULATION"

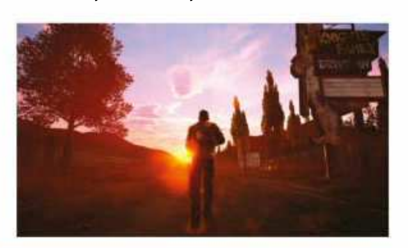






## MICROSOFT DETAILS ALL THE WAYS THAT YOU CAN PLAY

Undead Labs wants *State Of Decay 2* in the hands of as many gamers as possible. As such, it's going to be readily available. Xbox Game Pass owners should expect to find *State Of Decay 2* available to them to play from launch – the same goes for *Sea Of Thieves*, which is currently up on the service. Should you be Game Pass averse you'll be able to grab the full game for £29.99, which is a fantastic price for such a fully-fledged game release, while those of you with a Windows 10 PC will also be able to take advantage of the Play Anywhere initiative. Basically, Microsoft couldn't make it any easier to play *State Of Decay 2*. With no microtransactions in sight, there's very little reason you shouldn't jump into this excitedly on launch day.



# IN OTHER WATERS IS A SURREAL EXPLORATION OF THE UNKNOWN

## → HANDS-ON WITH A MUST-PLAY INDEPENDENT TITLE

FORMAT: **PC** | PUBLISHER: **GARETH DAMIAN MARTIN** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | RELEASE: **TBC** | PLAYERS: **1**

**I*n Other Waters* is an exploration of a great many things, but perhaps its greatest strength is in reminding us just how powerful the imagination can be in helping to fuel great game design.** A great many studios are racing towards the uncanny valley in an effort to draw us into new and mysterious worlds. *In Other Waters* has carved out its own path entirely.

It's a narrative-driven experience that takes place largely within the mind – a considered thought piece on conservation and an exploration of both environmentalist ideology and human-AI symbiosis. It evokes the same feeling of trepidation and curiosity that you're likely to find in a Metroid game, and it does so without a coloured key-card or gated area in sight. *In Other Waters* drives its gameplay through a unique tactile interface made up of sonar, gauges and panels; you scan environments and carefully navigate unearthly oceans, charting underwater courses with little knowledge of what dangers may lie ahead.

The presentation is minimal, to say the least, but it works. It lets your imagination do the heavy lifting, using your senses to guide you between points of interest and build a picture of the world enveloping you. Deafening audio cues will steer you away from potential trouble, though your curiosity will often override any common sense. We mentioned Metroid earlier, and that's largely down to one oft-forgotten aspect to the famed series' design: that of studying its world and ecosystems for knowledge and understanding. It's here where *In Other Waters* thrives; the demo, available to all online, presents just one expedition for you to sample, but it's a convincing glimpse into what creator Gareth Damian Martin is hoping to achieve here with the final release.

> "TECHNICALLY, YOU PLAY AS THE SUIT'S AI HERE"

Technically, you play as the suit's AI here. Your only form of communication with your human companion – that'll be the poor shmuck wearing the rusting divers gear and commenting on every piece of the puzzle as it is uncovered – is with simple commands: a 'yes' or 'no', two dialogue options that give a surprising amount of freedom to define the personality of the AI and relationship with the wearer of the suit. You also have control over the on-board array of radars and graphs; you too are also responsible for collecting samples of any hostile antigens in the ocean and processing potential antidotes of antitoxins to combat them. This is all executed with simple and intuitive key presses, but *In Other Waters* has a habit of quickly digging beneath the skin.

The world it presents is one of intrigue. You can't help but be drawn in by its minimalist art style and ambitious storytelling. That isn't just us going out on a limb here either, the game surpassed its Kickstarter goal of £22,000 – there's an appetite out there for this type of surreal narrative adventure, one that's obsessed with exploring relationships and alien life in a world defined by constantly intersecting pathways. You may not be familiar with the study of xenobiology now, but spend just a few minutes tracking, sampling and studying a planet's life – using the results to better navigate a strange planet's foreign oceans – and you'll be hooked.

*In Other Waters* isn't the result of Gareth Damian Martin alone, mind. Michael Berto (aka Paws Menu) is responsible for the music and sound design, while Zion Siton (*Swing Kings And The Temple Of Bling*) is handling the programming. Guest writers are set to include Greg Buchanan (*No Man's Sky: Atlas Rises*, *Aquanox: Deep Descent*), Danny Salfield Wadeson (*Abandon Ship*, *The Last Night*), and Cash DeCuir (*Sunless Sea: Zubmariner*, *Fallen London*), while *Sunless Sea*'s lead writer Alexis Kennedy is also involved in production.

It's the choices you make along the way that define this ambitious adventure. You haven't played anything quite like *In Other Waters*, of that we're certain. It's well worth your time and attention.

Above: *In Other Waters* has a beautiful minimalistic visual design and soundtrack. It's all made in an effort to create an immediate sense of place and a foreboding atmosphere. Right: If you're interested in exploring the world further, a companion book is being penned to further explore and study the world of Gliese 667Cc.




**IN BRIEF**
A strange and often unsettling narrative adventure based around the study of xenobiology

CENTRAL REEF

1.34 TOX.

5.86 NIT.

0.42 RAD.

1.01 VIS.

SET

HEADING

CELL PWR.

FLTR OXY.

SCN.

Towards the dropoff at around 100... or North, into the central reef. What do you think?

VOX

PILOT

COM.

CELL PWR.

FLTR OXY.

SCN.

No. This is impossible.

COM.

# ARE THE IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS OF ONRUSH ENOUGH?

→ THE FORMER DRIVECLUB TEAM IS GOING BIG FOR ITS CODEMASTERS DEBUT

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE** | PUBLISHER: **CODEMASTERS** | DEVELOPER: **CODEMASTERS EVO** | RELEASE: **5 JUNE 2018** | PLAYERS: **1-12**

**A race with no end point.** Monster trucks versus bikes. Vehicles in the race only to be smashed. There's a great deal about *Onrush* on paper that makes virtually no sense if you were to say we were describing a typical arcade racing experience, but Codemasters Evo is making something far from typical. Whether or not it may fall down some similar pitfalls as others who have attempted to revitalise the action racing genre, we'll consider shortly.

We've talked a little about the core concepts of *Onrush* previously, but a quick recap seems in order. First, there are no traditional point-to-point or circuit races here. All competitions are based on scoring systems and are team based, with the team winning the most rounds taking the prize and individual accolades distributed based on performance of key roles. The objectives are typically to collect points through takedowns, tricks, using Rush moves and accumulating/using boost, or collecting time for your team by passing through narrow gates. The team that runs out of time loses. There's no stop and start to rounds; the game just keeps going, and if you are taken out or crash you just respawn back in the pack (or stampede as the developer calls it quite aptly). So it's more like a shooter in structure, really.

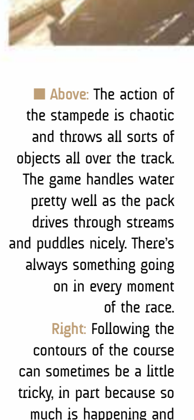
But in practice, how does that all work? Well in competitive multiplayer you have two teams of six battling it out around complex circuits with lots of jumps and destructible objects, building up boost and ultimately building up their Rush attack. These are essentially class-specific abilities, each tied to a type of vehicles and each having a role to play for your team, whether that's a bike that can leave a destructive slip-stream in its wake or a hulking SUV that batters through the pack. In theory the optimum team would be one with a balance of abilities, catered somewhat to the course type, capable of completing the objective while also disrupting the opposition. In our early chance to play the game, the exact implementation of that idea didn't quite get the opportunity to express itself – all we really saw was chaos.

> "THERE'S NO STOP AND START TO ROUNDS, THE GAME JUST KEEPS GOING"

And chaos isn't necessarily a bad thing; we can enjoy a little chaos in our action racing. What we enjoy less is when the action side of the racing experience starts to take away the sense of skill and control or any sense that you're making a meaningful contribution to the game. In multiplayer, for instance, while the game gets you back into the pack quickly, you can be knocked out of a race again and again in some frustrating moments without really understanding why. There's a slight lack of feedback there that keeps you at arms length and doesn't bring you to the edge of your seat in the way we would expect. The class system, while smart and logically sound, doesn't really feel like it's offering very much variety in gameplay right now.

And then there's just the general atmosphere and feel of the game, which in fairness to Codemasters Evo is still being finalised with regards to menus and interface. But it all feels very early Noughties to us. High-speed rock riffs, graffiti designs, thumping drum and bass beats, dancing avatars and more all feel like aspects of the genre grafted from another era. They have their place, but they feel so cheesy in this context, against the backdrop of a game that's attempting to innovate on many other fronts.

We walked away from playing *Onrush* with an overriding sense that it was a rather soulless experience. Fun in places, clearly packed with innovative ideas and a willingness to take risks, but still lacking something that connected and really got our hearts racing. And cementing that relationship between on-screen action and heart-rate is essential for an action racer to suck you in and demand you play just one more race. *Onrush* isn't there yet, but with the right tweaks it could still make it.

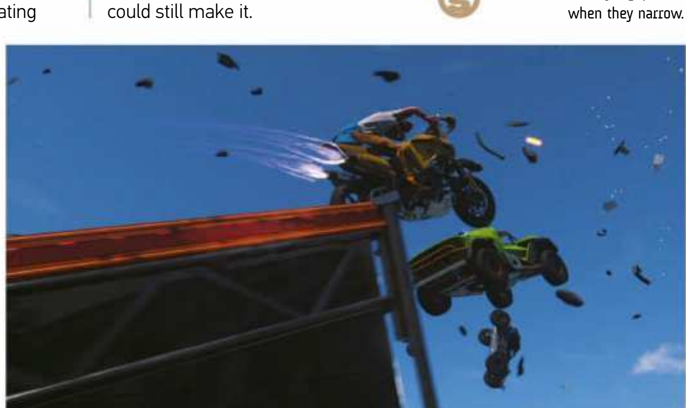


Above: The action of the stampede is chaotic and throws all sorts of objects all over the track. The game handles water pretty well as the pack drives through streams and puddles nicely. There's always something going on in every moment of the race.

Right: Following the contours of the course can sometimes be a little tricky, in part because so much is happening and also because while the courses tend to be very wide, they aren't always brilliantly signposted when they narrow.







## IN BRIEF

The action racer gets a FPS-inspired overhaul as the makers of *MotorStorm* and *Driveclub* continue to experiment







# THE FUN IN FODDER

Codemasters Evo has namechecked a number of core influences on its approach, with titles like *Burnout* and the team's own *MotorStorm* giving it a racing spine, while *Overwatch* and *Rocket League* give it a team-focused approach. However, we also see the presence of some classic MOBA influences, most especially in the presence of fodder vehicles. These weak, neutral cars, bikes and trucks are there simply to be destroyed and help you to accumulate boost and points for your team. Taking them out requires nothing more than a tap in most instances, and they can do you no real harm. However, having them populate the courses does make them feel a lot more manic, most particularly in the gate races, where space to pass through for additional time on your team's clock is limited. It's another smart take on the form that gives the multiplayer experience a more expansive feel, and evokes the concept of the stampede that the developer is looking to achieve.

# DRAGON QUEST XI IS THE MOST ACCESSIBLE ENTRY TO THE SERIES EVER

→ SQUARE ENIX GETS THIS HUGE JRPG LOCALISED FOR WESTERN AUDIENCES IN AN IMPRESSIVE FASHION

FORMAT: **PC, PS4** | PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | RELEASE: **4 SEPTEMBER 2018 (JAPAN: OUT NOW)** | PLAYERS: **1**

**The numbering has always been problematic.** Of the two decade-spanning Japanese RPG franchises in Square Enix's roster, it was always Final Fantasy that achieved worldwide acclaim and recognition. Western audiences quickly grasped – thanks, we're sure, to the impact *Final Fantasy VII* had on the market – that the games were approachable, and that the numbers counted for little in the grand scheme of things. Dragon Quest has never been quite so lucky over here. In fact, in spite of it being one of the biggest game series to ever launch in the East (for real, it's like *crazy* popular) it never quite replicated that success over here; the signature Blue Slimes never resonated in the same way as the beloved Chocobo or Moogle, the turn-based combat was seen as archaic and the whole presentation seemed to do little to stir interest outside of the core fanbase. The number attached to the side was a deterrent, if anything.

**IN BRIEF**
The 11th instalment to the long-running Dragon Quest series; its most accessible entry to date

Truth be told, we don't blame RPG fans for approaching with caution, but the truth of it is that *Dragon Quest XI: Echoes Of An Elusive Age* is well worth paying attention to should you have the time or inclination. It's rare to see a Japanese RPG series continue to be so in touch with what made it so great to begin with, and so many years on down the road. This 11th instalment sees series creator Yuji Horii, character designer Akira Toriyama and composer Koichi Sugiyama team up once again for what is undoubtedly the biggest entry to date. It's a quest across huge, sprawling continents – a race against time to push back against an ominous world-ending threat.

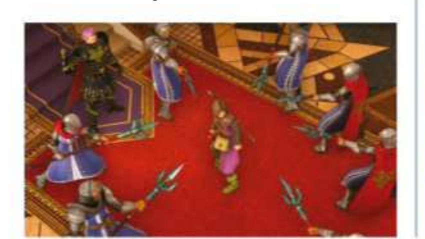
It's also a quest that's designed to be enjoyed by fans and newcomers alike. The deep and finely tuned turn-based combat is easy to grasp, while the detailed world and intricate character work is enjoyable to get on board with. The studio has even taken steps to make the game more appealing to Western audiences – taking on feedback and answering critics since the game's release in Japan last summer. We're talking a fully overhauled UI and menus, more intuitive world navigation and graphical enhancements to make it more appealing to the eye; camera mode has been introduced, much to the excitement of PS4 players, while system-level enhancements such as improved camera and character control and an all-new dash function only serve to make *Dragon Quest XI* one of the most accessible entries in the franchise to date.

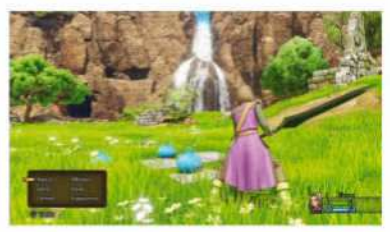
If you've ever been curious about Dragon Quest in the past, this is the best time to jump in and give it a try. It can be intimidating at times, but that's all part of the fun of it. They don't make many Japanese RPGs like this any more (just look at what happened to Final Fantasy), so be sure to give this a try should you have the opportunity.



Above: Square Enix has confirmed that the 3DS version of *Dragon Quest XI* won't be coming to the West, but a Switch port is supposedly still in the works.

Left: *Dragon Quest XI* will arrive with full English dubs should that be a deal-breaker, although the Japanese originals are in there as an option too.





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**COMING THIS YEAR**

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# SOULCALIBUR VI HEROES THEN AND NOW

→ HOW THE SOULS HAVE CHANGED IN THIS REBOOTED SEQUEL

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | PUBLISHER: **BANDAI NAMCO**
DEVELOPER: **PROJECT SOULS** | RELEASE: **TBC 2018** | PLAYERS: **1-2**

IN BRIEF
The stage of history has been reset, taking us back to the original *Soulcalibur* and many of our favourite fighters

**Look into the details of what Project Souls is doing with *Soulcalibur VI*, and you begin to see, as we have, a greatest hits of the series being brought together.** As such, it's no great surprise that the developer would think returning to the original *Soulcalibur* and its 1586 setting would be a smart move. We are going back in time in terms of the character designs, but the combat certainly isn't.

The biggest new feature is a system called Reversal Edge, activated by a single button press, resulting in a complex rock, paper, scissors piece of decision making that determines the outcome of the clash, and kicks off a stunning animated battle sequence whether you win, lose or draw. It seems very much like activating a super, but with both players getting a chance to win.

In addition, armour breaks, guard impacts, critical edge and soul charge are all being included, some with tweaks from their previous appearances. But as we say, one thing that isn't changing is the looks of the souls taking the stage of history, so let's remind ourselves of who is entering the fray so far.




## NIGHTMARE

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOULCALIBUR**
SOUL | **DAMNATION AND DESTRUCTION**

1 As the embodiment of the Soul Edge's will, Nightmare is most often hosted by a great warrior, the first being series regular Siegfried (who has yet to be confirmed for this game, but is likely to come). As *Soulcalibur* begins, the legendary warrior Siegfried is being consumed by the power of Soul Edge and its will takes over, causing him to change into the Azure Knight.

## ISABELLA 'IVY' VALENTINE

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOULCALIBUR**
SOUL | **DELIVERANCE**

2 Having seen her adopted father driven mad in his pursuit of the Soul Edge, which he believed to be a source of eternal youth, Ivy sets herself the mission of destroying it. She creates a whip blade that she seeks to imbue with life, believing that only a living sword can destroy Soul Edge. However she does not know what she really summoned to achieve this with her sorcery and she may not like the answer.




## KILIK

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOULCALIBUR**
SOUL | **VALOR**

3 Having been corrupted by the evil energy of Soul Edge in the form of the Evil Seed, Kilik was saved by the Edge Master and given a sacred treasure, the Dvapara-Yuga, to wear and ward off its effects. As such, Kilik cannot take off the sacred mirror for fear of going mad. Now, destroying Soul Edge is his only hope of being free of the Evil Seed for good and living a normal life again.

## HEISHIRO MITSURUGI

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOUL EDGE**
SOUL | **STRENGTH**

4 The fourth son of a farmer, Mitsurugi is probably Soulcalibur's most iconic character since he has appeared in every instalment of the series. In the original timeline of the game he trained as a samurai after leaving his home, later becoming a mercenary and sought the 'hero sword' as a means of combating the arrival of the rifle on fields of battle that could make his skills irrelevant in future conflicts.

## SOPHITIA ALEXANDRA

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOUL EDGE**
SOUL | **TRUTH**

5 Hailing from Athens and sent on a holy quest to destroy Soul Edge by the Olympian god Hephaestus, Sophitia wields the Omega Sword, which has the ability to destroy the cursed weapon. She was very close in her attempt to achieve this in *Soul Edge*, but rejoins the quest in *Soulcalibur*, having also become engaged. Sophitia has appeared in all but one title in the series so far.

## CHAI XIANGHUA

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOULCALIBUR**
SOUL | **LOVE**

6 Another fighter who joined the battle in *Soulcalibur*, Xianghua is a born warrior with a long and proud family history of sword-fighting ancestors. Under the guise of a travelling opera troupe, Xianghua and a band of the Imperial Guard are searching for the 'Hero Sword' at the behest of the Ming Dynasty's emperor, but after learning its true nature, she commits to destroying Soul Edge with the help of Kilik and Maxi.

## ZASALAMEL

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOULCALIBUR III**
SOUL | **ANGUISH**

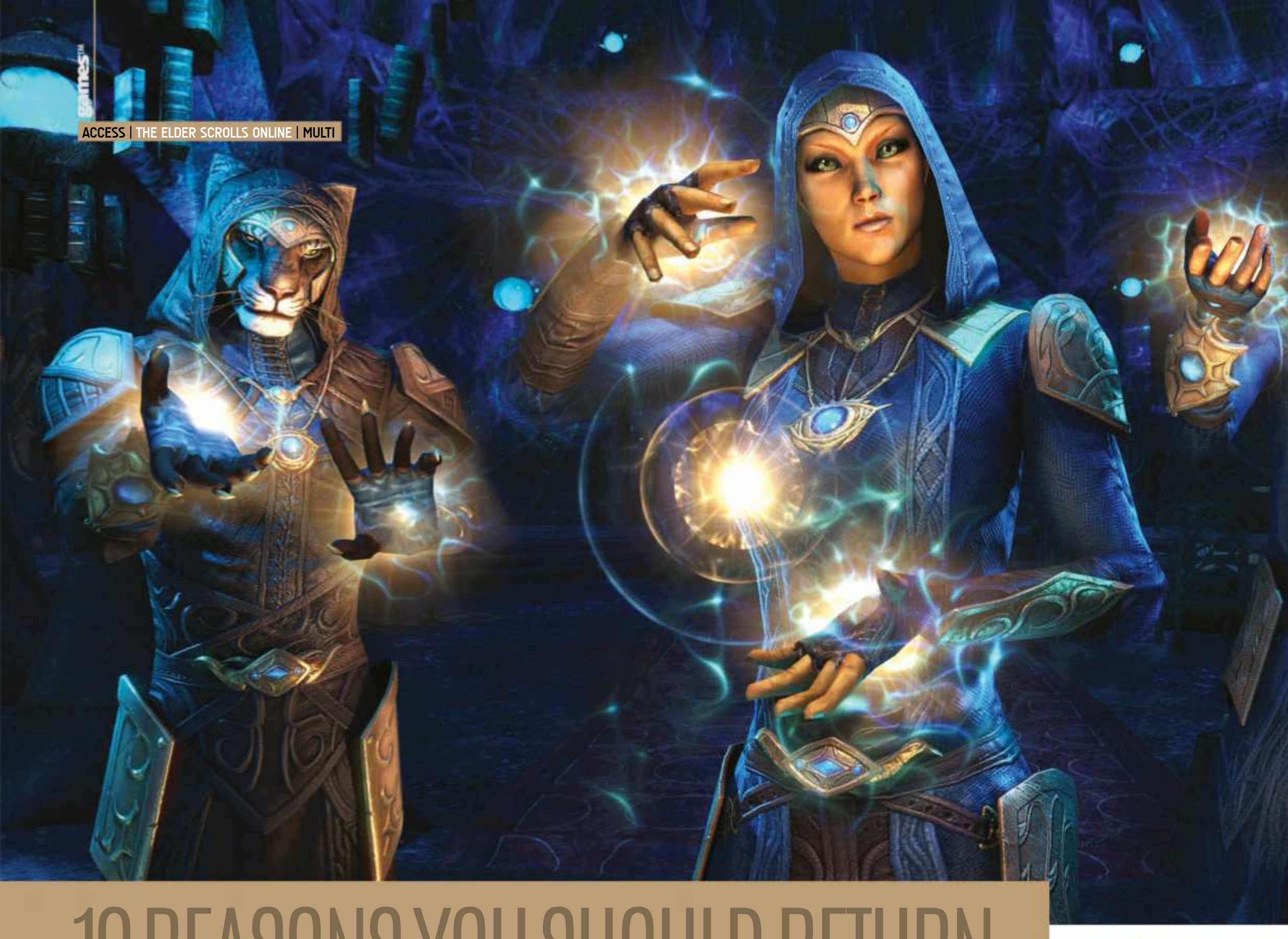
7 Since he didn't originally appear in *Soulcalibur*, we're left to delve a little deeper into Zasalamel's back story to see why he might be entering here. Having been born in a tribe sworn to protect, but not use, Soul Calibur, Zasalamel was banished after attempting to claim the sword. He would later cast a reincarnation spell on himself that means he cannot die, but as a result he has lost the joy of life. He seeks Soul Edge as a means of destroying himself.

## A NEW CHALLENGER

## GRØH

FIRST APPEARANCE | **SOULCALIBUR VI**
SOUL | **UNKNOWN**

8 This is a new fighter for the series, hailing from Norway and wielding a double saber. His alignment and intentions are not yet known, but he is thought to be a member of the Aval Organisation, a group devoted to destroying Soul Edge and all those corrupted by it. He is the first new character to be added to the new Soulcalibur timeline, and we expect a few more may well follow.



# 10 REASONS YOU SHOULD RETURN TO THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

→ A NEW ISLE SIGNALS A NEW BEGINNING

FORMAT: **PC, PS4, XBOX ONE** | PUBLISHER: **BETHESDA SOFTWORKS** | DEVELOPER: **ZENIMAX ONLINE STUDIOS** | RELEASE: **OUT NOW** | PLAYERS: **MMO**

## ALIVE AND KICKING

1 It may have launched in 2014 and been subject to some pretty sizable changes in the intervening years, but *The Elder Scrolls Online* is better than it has ever been. ZeniMax Online has quietly put in fantastic work to *ESO*; the servers are stable, the console optimisation is pretty incredible and there's such a wealth of content available. *Every* Elder Scrolls fan needs to try it for themselves.

## A NEW EXPANSION

2 *ESO* has been supported by a large variety of content updates over the years, but it's the sizeable expansion chapters that have truly impressed. The release of *Morrowind* in 2017 was remarkable, whisking players away to Vvardenfell for the first time since the release of the 2002 cult classic *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*. That's why excitement is running high for ZeniMax Online's latest, *Summerset*.

## (RE)INTRODUCES SUMMERSET ISLES

3 The new expansion *Summerset* is, for all intents and purposes, effectively a brand-new area of Tamriel for fans to explore. The Summerset Isles were a group of islands first introduced in series originator *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* back in 1994 though it barely scratched the surface of this lush and beautiful land. Trust us, this has been a long time coming.

## IT IS HUGE

4 ZeniMax is going all out with this one. The Summerset Isles are big, like, *really* big. The studio has promised that the area is even larger than that of *ESO: Morrorwind*'s Vvardenfell. Good thing, because the Isles are not only going to conclude the epic Daedric drama that's kept the story rolling along since 2015's *Orsinium* DLC, but it's also going to introduce a bunch of new content too.

## A NEW ORDER

5 The various guilds and orders scattered across Tamriel often provide the very best quest-lines. That's why we are excited to join up with the Psijic Order for the very first time, as well as their secretive home city of Artaeum. It's here where you'll be able to gain a new combat skill line and begin to wield control over time itself as you study with the mages of the Psijic Order.

IN BRIEF
An MMO set in The Elder Scrolls universe, one of the last truly great massively multiplayer games on the market







## NEW PVE CHALLENGES

6 To celebrate the release of the Summerset Isles, ZeniMax has designed a brand-new series of PvE challenges to be played with friends (or randoms that you can pull together on the forums for that matter). Cloudrest is an all-new 12-player trial, featuring a variety of new Delves and Bosses to study and defeat. Its difficulty is based on the bosses you take on or skip.

## WELCOMING TO NEWBIES

7 If you're a brand-new player to *ESO*, you need not worry. The game's unique chapter structure and level-scaling means that the new content is easily accessible, fun and engaging regardless of your experience. A starter area in the Summerset Isles will get you up to speed quickly, cutting down on the time it'll take before you can sink your teeth into the good stuff.

## PLENTY FOR VETERANS

8 Veteran players need not worry about starting a new warrior. Once you purchase the new expansion you'll be able to take your hero straight into the new zone – or start a new character entirely, it's up to you! Of course, with Jewellery Crafting being introduced as a new crafting skill, it may be worth taking your levelled character over to get a head start on obtaining that powerful new gear.

## THE STABLE SERVERS

9 This isn't ZeniMax's first attempt at getting expansions online. Those in the care of MMOs often suffer when launching large new content, with the servers buckling under the pressure of new and returning players eager to see what all the fuss is about. But *ESO* has only continued to grow; ZeniMax and Bethesda have invested heavily in the game, so you should expect minimal disruption on launch week.

## IT'S COMING SOON

10 If you're excited about jumping into and exploring the Summerset Isles, you'll be happy to learn that it is scheduled to launch on 5 June 2018. Pre-purchase bonuses are in play for any of you that *just can't wait* and, for any of you that are still on the fence about trying *ESO*, you'll be happy to hear that free game weeks are scheduled around the launch.

# THE 'NINDIES' KEEP COMING ON SWITCH

→ NINTENDO REVEALS ITS NEXT WAVE OF INDIE EYE-CATCHERS

**With a year of fantastic games behind it, the Switch is beginning to hit its stride.** Nintendo was keen to demonstrate that the good times aren't going away, taking the time to announce a slew of new independent games and third-party ports coming to the system in 2018. Thought Nintendo only cared about first party? It's taken 12 months for the company to completely quash that bad reputation.

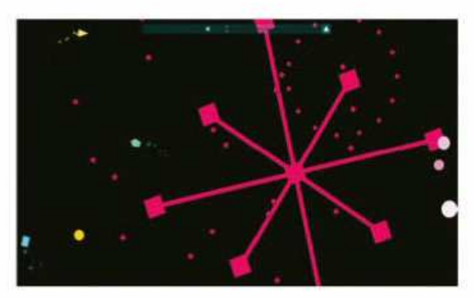
"It's hard to believe that it was already a year ago that I was telling you about the amazing games that we had lined up for the Nintendo Switch. Now I won't get all wistful on you, but I do want to thank the Nindies – the content partners that made this last year one to remember," said Damon Baker, Nintendo of America's senior manager for publisher & developer relations. "What started as a community has grown into a family, supported by the shared passion between independent developers, their games and the fans that have embraced them. I'm happy to say that the family will continue to grow through 2018 and beyond."

As much as we would love to shout about the excellent remasters of modern classics – the likes of *Mark Of The Ninja*, *Lumines*, *Banner Saga* and its sequel, *Reigns: King And Queen*, *Dark Souls*, *Crashlands* and *Hyper Light Drifter* – on the near horizon, we've decided to dedicate this space to 12 of the very best brand-new titles reaching the system before the year's end. Nintendo has, reportedly, got more games in the pipeline than it has time to market or bandwidth to get onto the store front, so expect the library of games to only increase as the year winds on; it's been a long time coming, but Nintendo is finally back on top, working hard to make the Switch one of the most attractive and diverse gaming systems on the market.



## FANTASY STRIKE

1 Designed to be an accessible fighting game that doesn't compromise on its depth, *Fantasy Strike* looks to be a fun combination of tactical button bashing and visually impressive special attacks that change up the speed and scale of combat for both brawlers. It'll be hitting Switch this summer.



## JUST SHAPES & BEATS

2 Have you ever wanted to play a co-operative music-based bullet-hell game? No, we can't say we've even entertained the idea either, but that doesn't mean we aren't hugely excited to see how it plays out! *Just Shapes & Beats* looks completely mad – we are 100 per cent into it.



## GARAGE

3 *No Time To Explain* developer tinyBuild is back, this time with a top-down shooter called *Garage*. Violent and fast-paced, *Garage* is heavily inspired by B-movie action and subsequently traps you in a dark underworld setting in which you must battle against waves of the walking dead to survive.







## POOL PANIC

4 Winning the award for least realistic pool simulator, *Pool Panic* is a Switch console exclusive coming in 2018. It looks fun and slightly unhinged, which is what you'd expect from Adult Swim Games. This off-kilter game has over 100 levels and supports four-player local multiplayer.

## BOMB CHICKEN

5 Gaming's obsession with putting chickens in compromising positions is unending, as proven once more with *Bomb Chicken*. Go on a mission to find out what's in the secret sauce in this puzzle-action platformer, laying bombs to overcome puzzles, defeat enemies and escape a litany of dangerous situations.

## LIGHT FALL

6 Fans of *Celeste* will want to take note of *Light Fall*. It's got a visually arresting artistic design, a stunning soundtrack and pixel-perfect jump mechanics. Manipulating a magic box to aid you in your journey, expect *Light Fall* to be a frustrating platformer that you won't be able to put down.








## WEST OF LOATHING

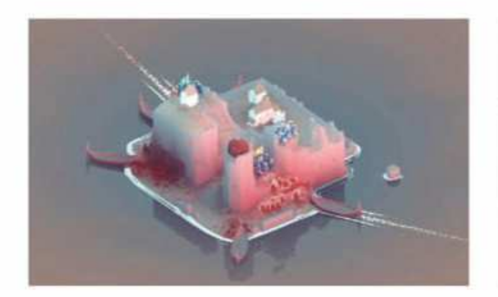
7 Slapstick comedy makes its way to Switch in the form of *West Of Loathing*, a console exclusive RPG played out through a wacky stick figure visual design. Don't let its simplistic looks fool you though, this Wild West game is surprisingly deep and intuitive, featuring optional turn-based combat and smart opportunities to shape the story through your actions.

## PODE

8 Inspired by Norwegian art and culture, *Pode* is a beautiful co-op exploration game in which you and a travelling companion seek to unlock the mysteries of the land by solving puzzles and avoiding a variety of dangers. *Pode* seems fairly easy going, giving us ample opportunity to soak in its wonderful audio and visual design.

## THE MESSENGER

9 There's more than meets the eye to this Ninja Gaiden-inspired must-play action-platformer. *The Messenger* is in actuality a time-travelling adventure; completing it first time through will open up portals across the game world that let you dive between 8-bit and 16-bit generations to access new areas, enemies and secrets.







## BAD NORTH

10 Real-time tactics, minimalistic visuals and punishing roguelike elements come crashing together in *Bad North*, the new strategy game from Plausible Concept. Defend your home from invasions and be wary of losing commanders on the battlefield during the fray – once they're lost, they're lost forever.

## BANNER SAGA 3

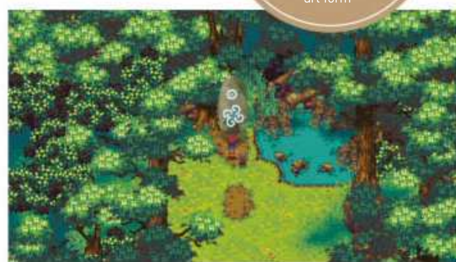
11 Stoic's critically-acclaimed fantasy role-playing series Banner Saga is making its way to Switch this summer. The stunning visuals, nuanced story, deep strategy systems and easily digestible structure makes the Switch a natural fit. This is one game you'll want to have installed ahead of any journey.

## TRAVIS STRIKES AGAIN: NO MORE HEROES

12 Travis Touchdown (along with a co-op partner) will make his way through seven virtual worlds, each comprised of a different genre – action, racing and puzzle have already been confirmed. It certainly isn't *No More Heroes 3*, but this still looks like it's going to be a lot of fun.

**IN BRIEF**
Two former Lionhead staffers who worked on the entirety of the Fable series look to keep its whimsical style going in pixel art form





# KYNSEED KEEPS THE SPIRIT OF LIONHEAD ALIVE

→ FORMER FABLE DEVS HAVE A NEW INDIE RPG IN DEVELOPMENT

FORMAT: **TBC** | PUBLISHER: **PIXELCOUNT STUDIOS** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | RELEASE: **TBC 2018** | PLAYERS: **1**



## PIXEL PARADISE

1 Despite having backgrounds in 3D game design with Lionhead's Fable series, as well as Black & White and Movies, Neal Whitehead and Charlton Edwards (with some assists from other former Lionhead staffers) have created a gorgeously realised pixel art world for *Kynseed*. The lush countryside landscapes and ragid villages feel like something straight out of British folklore. It's a nice balance between looking like a classic 16-bit RPG and offers something with its own character.



## DARK FAIRY TALES

2 Speaking of folklore, an element we don't see referenced often from classic British myths and legends is the role of the mischievous or manipulative fairy. *Kynseed* is said to feature four magical creatures who will influence your time in the world of Quill, the first to be revealed called Mr Fairweather. His intent may not be pure, but it's this waifish fairy who gives you the kynseed that begins your journey. It's a bargain that may come with hidden costs.



## KEEPING AN OLD PROMISE

3 It was a classic Lionhead and Fable promise of old that you would be able to plant a seed and watch a tree grow as you played the game. That's pretty much the central conceit of *Kynseed* as the titular object spawns a family tree that reacts to and records the lifetimes of your starting character and offspring. When your character grows old and dies then you will become one of the children in their place and continue the tale.



## LONG MEMORIES

4 It's not only the tree that will record your progress. Your standing with local villages and traders will be affected by how you behave around them and how well you react to and read their needs or desires. Every town will have its unique interests and every citizen their own hopes and fears. This is doubly important since you'll have a farm to cultivate and sell from as well as the opportunity to run other businesses in the world.



# MUTANT YEAR ZERO: ROAD TO EDEN IS THE SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR TO XCOM YOU NEVER KNEW YOU NEEDED

→ ROLEPLAYING AT THE END OF THE WORLD

FORMAT: **PC, PS4, XBOX ONE** | PUBLISHER: **FUNCOM**
DEVELOPER: **THE BEARDED LADIES** | RELEASE: **Q3 2018** | PLAYERS: **TBC**

**Going up against XCOM in the turn-based strategy space is never a wise tactical decision.** Developer Firaxis Games has proven time and time again that it has a mastery over the space – precious few studios have even come close to touching it. And yet there's something undeniably appealing about XCOM's latest challenger, *Mutant Year Zero: Road To Eden*.

Created by Swedish development outfit The Bearded Ladies – boasting veterans of the Hitman, Payday, and Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter series on its team – this is a tactical adventure game that's aware of its lineage. *Road To Eden* respects where it has come from, taking the basic construction of the XCOM games and twisting it ever so slightly to help build its own identity and space to play – science-fiction is swapped out for fantasy as we creep across a post-human world ravaged by everything from climate change to a mysterious pandemic and nuclear war. Deep and tactical combat is to combine with an interesting real-time stealth system to give you more options than ever when approaching a wide variety of scenarios, while the arrival of fully-fleshed out characters – each with their own personality, style and gripes against the world – will be an intriguing departure from the procedurally-generated nature of XCOM's characters. *Mutant Year Zero* is scheduled to release later this year and it has certainly caught our attention; the devil is, of course, in the detail, but for now we've seen enough to keep this high on the list of anticipated titles for 2018.

## IN BRIEF

A tactical adventure game combining the turn-based action of XCOM with an extra dose of story, exploration, stealth and strategy




"MUTANT YEAR ZERO IS A TACTICAL ADVENTURE GAME THAT'S AWARE OF ITS LINEAGE"

## TACTICAL, FAMILIAR DESIGN

Fans of XCOM will want to pay attention to *Mutant Year Zero: Road To Eden*. The game is directly inspired by the popular strategy series, taking on a familiar turn-based tactical combat system. Where The Bearded Ladies is hoping to set *Mutant Year Zero* apart from the rest is by integrating the action into a world fraught with danger, on the brink of total collapse from a variety of antagonistic threats.

## REAL-TIME STEALTH

*Mutant Year Zero* is designed to be a challenging experience. Direct combat isn't always the smartest option, and so you'll need to utilise the smart real-time stealth systems to better manoeuvre your squad into optimal positions across a variety of enemy encampments and scorched-Earth battlegrounds. Real-time stealth gives you full control over your approach; it's a smart evolution of the guerrilla warfare setup *XCOM 2* experimented with, handing even more power (and gameplay potential) to the player.

## MUTANT MARAUDERS

Drawing from the legacy of the Mutant Year Zero tabletop game, *Road To Eden* will also feature a pretty wild cast of characters. These aren't your typical heroes; each of the colourful cast comes equipped with their own unique personalities, specialist roles, and unique mutations to give them a much-needed edge in combat and navigation. Given the dynamic nature of the environments and combat situations, eking out the potential of each character recruited to your squad is essential.



WHY I ♥...

# FUTURE WARS: ADVENTURES IN TIME

CORY BARLOG, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SONY SANTA MONICA

*The first game that comes to mind is one that I played on the Amiga, it's called* Future Wars. *It was the first game that I binged; I stayed up for almost two-days straight playing through this game, and it was on floppies so I had to keep getting up to switch them the longer I was playing it. It's a very obtuse adventure game, but it was one of those first games that made me realise that the story in a game can truly captivate you – that a story can actually carry you through and set a sense of place. I had not experienced that before in a game.*

*I had played some games that had decent stories before, but for some reason this one spoke to me. It's this interesting everyman story about this guy that is washing windows at the beginning of the game and is travelling to alternate universes by the end of it. I thought it was absolutely brilliant.*



"It was one of those first games that made me realise that the story in a game can truly captivate you"

CORY BARLOG, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SONY SANTA MONICA

# KING OF



**GAMES™** SPEAKS WITH KEY MEMBERS OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS TEAMS AT EPIC GAMES TO INVESTIGATE THE INCREDIBLE RISE OF BATTLE ROYALE, THE STATE OF SAVE THE WORLD, AND WHAT THE SUSTAINED SUCCESS OF THESE TWO TITLES COULD MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE GAMES INDUSTRY




**F*ortnite* was never supposed to become a global attraction.** Then again, few creations ever are, and few videogames ever do. From casual players to seasoned gamers, for school children and celebrity icons, *Fortnite: Battle Royale* has become something of a genuine obsession. It has reached a plateau reserved for those special few videogames that are able to confidently pierce the consciousness of the general public while still igniting a spark of imagination in the minds of players around the world. The *Fortnite* IP has found itself in a position that few in the industry ever imagined it was capable of reaching – and that includes its creator, Epic Games.

It would be easy enough for this level of attention and success to act as a rush of blood to the head, but the veteran game creator and engine maker is humble in its assessment of the cultural compulsion it has found itself at the heart of after a whirlwind seven months. "We're really lucky that we've become a part of this cultural phenomenon," Kim Libreri, Epic Games' chief technical officer, tells us as we attempt to navigate the storm that is currently enveloping the influential studio. "We just wanted to entertain people, but we're a part of the zeitgeist now, just like the community that is playing the game." »



"So, where has it [the success] all come from? I don't know, was it the chicken or the egg?" laughs Libreri, though he failed to elaborate any further on the analogy, so stick with us on this one. The egg, we surmise, is *Fortnite: Battle Royale* itself; the chicken, the players that have appeared in their millions to play it; the two utterly inseparable from one another when considering 2018's most unlikely success story.

But that success is there, and it is clear for all to see. There are YouTube and Twitch streams viewed millions of times over; we've seen confused cable news anchors scramble to process its impact, and it has pushed politicians and pundits to crawl back out of the woodwork to once again decry the influence of videogames on society. The industry hasn't seen anything on this scale for quite some time, and it's electrifying to witness it in real-time.

It has even surprised Epic's founder and CEO, Tim Sweeny – a creative force that we'd suspect has just about seen it all after his 27 years at the forefront of the industry. Sweeny is watching on with interest, eager to see where *Fortnite* could possibly go next. If he's certain of anything though, it's that it isn't going far without the support of the community that has formed around it. "I have to say, because I really do wonder, but who are the real developers of *Fortnite* now? By definition it is Epic, but actually if you look at what's happening on Reddit, and between the players, the streamers and the content creators on YouTube, it's like we are all designing the game together."

As a sentiment, it's one that is shared by many of the developers working to keep *Fortnite* up on its feet and moving forwards. Eric Williamson, design lead and systems engineer overseeing what is arguably the most popular game on the planet, is one such developer – working diligently to ensure that an open and honest dialogue will keep Epic from straying too far in the wrong direction as it sets its sights on bringing *Battle Royale* out of early access in the coming months. "From the start, we wanted the development to be a conversation. When we first launched *Battle Royale* we knew we had work to do. We had an idea of where the game would go, but [we] wanted to stay open – not only to listening to feedback, but actually being able to act on it," Williamson tells us. "We think of the game as a canvas and a set of tools for players to use and have fun with. It's really cool to see the things they come up with – whether it's rocket riding or a unique way to use building. Giving them new tools to play with is just a lot of fun."

It *is* a lot of fun; so much so, that it's easy to forget that, for Epic, this is also a critical time. There is no precedent set for managing this level of sustained success; there is no playbook for catering to an audience as large and varied as the one that has formed around *Battle Royale*. It has undergone a period of sustained and focused iteration, growth and expansion since its low-key launch in September 2017. Epic is processing and acting on feedback from the community in record time, and the community is responding in kind by pumping more and more of their time into it.

It's funny, because in spite of the success, this wasn't the future Epic had originally envisioned for *Fortnite* – a game that the studio had incubated in one way or another since 2011. It took six years to get *Fortnite: Save The World* (as the core PvE co-op mode is now known to the public) to a stage in which Epic felt comfortable releasing it into paid early access on 25 July 2017. It also took just two more months for it to approach virtual irrelevancy in the eyes of many.

*Save The World* amassed a passionate and dedicated audience, but something about it clearly failed to resonate with the masses. Some in the industry – us included – had started to worry that Epic would eventually begin to divert its resources and personnel towards its other early-access experiment, Paragon. Perhaps public perception isn't everything. *Fortnite*'s VP of publishing Ed Zobrist would later expand on the current state of *Save The World* at GDC in a rare comment about the survival co-op mode. "It exceeded our expectations. It laid the groundwork for our game to continue to grow as it marches on towards its free-to-play status that will be out later this year. I'm happy to say that retention is high, and here we are over six months later, and our player base is larger than it has ever been – [and that's] for *Save The World*, not just for *BR*. This has worked out extremely well for us."

While *Save The World* is still fighting for attention, it's impossible to overlook the impact of *Battle Royale*. It landed out of nowhere, and there's no clear explanation as to how it has continued to defy all expectation. It arrived, in September 2017, just as the battle royale genre had began to reach its zenith, with console and mobile players eager to try the experience for themselves after listening to PC players and media outlets prattle on about *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* for the better part of a year. And better still, *Fortnite*'s family-friendly version of the game mode was free-to-play, entertaining to spectate, and easy to get to grips with.

This is a part of the story that we are all intimately familiar with. There have been hundreds of thousands of words written about the launch of *Battle Royale* with outlets attempting to surmise its success. We aren't going to waste your time with another such speculative pursuit. Instead, we wanted to use our time and access to the development team and studio to uncover how any of this was made possible; to understand how Epic positioned itself in such a way that it could spend six years developing a core experience, only to take over the world on a whim just two months later.



***Fortnite: Battle Royale*** **has emerged as one of the biggest and most popular games in the world in just seven months. Its lack of explicit violence, the fact that its free-to-play, its vivid art-style and fast round time all factoring into its huge success.**









# SAVE THE WORLD

## HAVE YOU PLAYED THE ORIGINAL FORTNITE GAME MODE?



Given the popularity spike of *Fortnite: Battle Royale*, there's a fairly good chance that you either haven't played its companion, *Save The World*, or have no real understanding of what it is. That's why we wanted to take this quick opportunity to reintroduce you to the game that started this huge experiment for Epic.

"*Fortnite* is a cooperative, action, building game where you loot, craft and build giant forts and ultimately defend them from giant hordes of monsters, all in a procedurally generated world so that the game experience is never the same twice," *Save The World* creative lead Darren Sugg told us when the game first launched in paid early access.

"Our game started with everybody having this simple idea of building forts… whether it's Harry Potter making the last stand at Hogwarts or it's Aragorn on the battlements of Helm's Deep, the few against the horde is a very visceral thing. With *Fortnite* we wanted to take that idea, which is very primal for a lot of kids in their young experiences and through adulthood, and put our particular spin on it," says Sugg, noting that the team was eager to push away from the gritty visual style it inherited after its creation in a game jam in 2011 and, while the team couldn't have known it at the time, it's this key decision (we'd wager) that has also pushed *Battle Royale* so far into the spotlight. "We thought, what if we took another spin on it and we made it a bit more stylised and a bit more vibrant and it was a place that players could spend hundreds of hours and feel it's cool to be a part of this world. It won't be dark and fatiguing… *Fortnite* as a whole continued on into that vein both visually and tonally."

*Save The World* is a fun co-op PvE experience that only seems to get better as every month passes by. We're confident that, when it finally emerges from paid early access in 2018 and properly links up with its battle royale cousin, it'll find real success. Keep your eye on this one and don't pass it up; it's directly benefiting from the work concluded in the battle royale space, and it's only getting better because of it.

## "NOW THAT THE CORE OF THE GAME IS MOSTLY IN PLACE, WE'RE ABLE TO HAVE A LOT OF FUN"

And believe us, it really was a whim: "*Battle Royale* was the nucleus of about 20 people," Sweeny tells us excitedly. "It was basically the *Unreal Tournament* team that [came in] and decided, 'Hey, we love these battle royale games, lets build one on top of *Fortnite*'. That's how the game emerged."

Given that *Fortnite* was originally conceived as part of an internal game jam back in 2011, it seems only fitting that a mod – from the team behind *Unreal Tournament* no less, a franchise that has found extreme sustainability over the decades largely because of such support – should ultimately be the catalyst for *Fortnite*'s ascension on the world stage.

Zobrist would later expand on this process. Because if *Battle Royale*'s origins weren't spectacular enough already, we were pretty shocked to discover how quickly the team at Epic put this thing together and got it out into the hands of the public. "We started working on this just about the time *Save The World* was coming out," Zobrist revealed, reaffirming how eager the team were to make a competitive PvP shooter work within the boundaries of the original PvE-driven design. "So let's do some math: *Save The World*, the PvE game, launched 21 July. [*Battle Royale*] comes out 26 September… that's just two months in development."

There's an element of 'right place at the right time' behind the success of *Battle Royale*, but there's something more purposeful and defined behind this story too. This was all made possible because of how agile Epic can be in the development space. It's that element of the company that, ultimately, saved *Battle Royale* from launching into relative obscurity – trapped behind the same pay wall that has held *Save The World* at arm's length for so many players.

Epic had planned for *Battle Royale* to be a mere companion to the co-op experience, enough of a draw that it could bring in some of the competitive players that had put their trust in Epic so many times over the years without diluting the core of the game. "Then things changed," Zobrist noted. "We were getting really close to launch. We had already started marketing it as this PvP »



# BE KIND, REWIND

## WHY BATTLE ROYALE'S NEW REPLAY MODE COULD HAVE HUGE RAMIFICATIONS

Epic is investing considerable resources into the YouTube personalities and Twitch streamers that have helped turn *Fortnite: Battle Royale* into such a global phenomenon. The company announced at GDC 2018 that it was developing a new replay editor for the Unreal Engine; effectively, it puts professional grade recording and editing tools into the hands of the players. The first game to make use of this system will be *Fortnite*, and the results are certainly impressive. .

The tools will allow *Fortnite* players (and soon, any developer using the Unreal platform) to really enshrine their favourite moments and share them out across the web. "In the replay system you can go set up cameras, follow a character, do long shots, wide shots, we've even got drones in there that you can use to follow [the action]," Epic's CTO Kim Libreri tells us. "Not only is it great for telling the story of what happened in a game, but if we had the replay system a few months ago, when people worked out how to ride the rockets, we would have been able to go into that game and actually film it."

That's important to note, as it gives us a clear view of where Epic wants to take, not only these tools, but *Fortnite* in the future. "It starts to open all these new possibilities," Libreri tells us excitedly of the replay system that has been expanded from its original implementation in the ill-fated Paragon. "We literally have the technology right now in the engine that we could beam a shooting crew into your live match, like a documentary crew – we just make the characters invisible and they'll follow you around.

"Once we begin to think about competitive tournaments for *Fortnite*, we can go in live and film that action... can you imagine? It's gonna be like ESPN or like any major sports event, but in the virtual world of the game," he says, and it's clear to us that the potential for these tools to be used across the esports scene could be huge, particularly as studios look towards TV franchising and expansion. "We could even do episodic content, where we combine the best of performance capture and real actors driving faces, and then *put* them into the world of *Fortnite*. As a gamer you could have your 15 seconds of fame where we can incorporate what happened in *your* game into a story that *we* tell. There is all sorts of crazy stuff that we can do [in the engine]... honestly, I think five years from now we'll look back and go, wow, entertainment totally changed."



**The YouTube and Twitch communities have really rallied around Epic's latest in a big way. Statistics would indicate that, as of writing, *Fortnite* is the most watched game in the world. It's averaging close to 140,000 views on Twitch every week, which is double the traffic of rival *PUBG*.**

mode that was going to be inside of *Save The World*. From what we can tell, people even started to buy *Save The World* in anticipation of being able to play it..."

It's around this time, just two weeks out from *Battle Royale* going live on public servers, that Epic saw an opportunity and grasped at it with both hands. It decided to take a huge risk, to separate *Battle Royale* out from *Save The World* and launch it as a free-to-play early access experience – one that runs through the same client, but ultimately circumvents the inherent restrictions and uncertainties attached to paid early access. "You can imagine how difficult this was in just two weeks time to get through," Zobrist said defiantly. "I doubt any major publisher could have pulled off this kind of pivot in the time we ended up doing it."

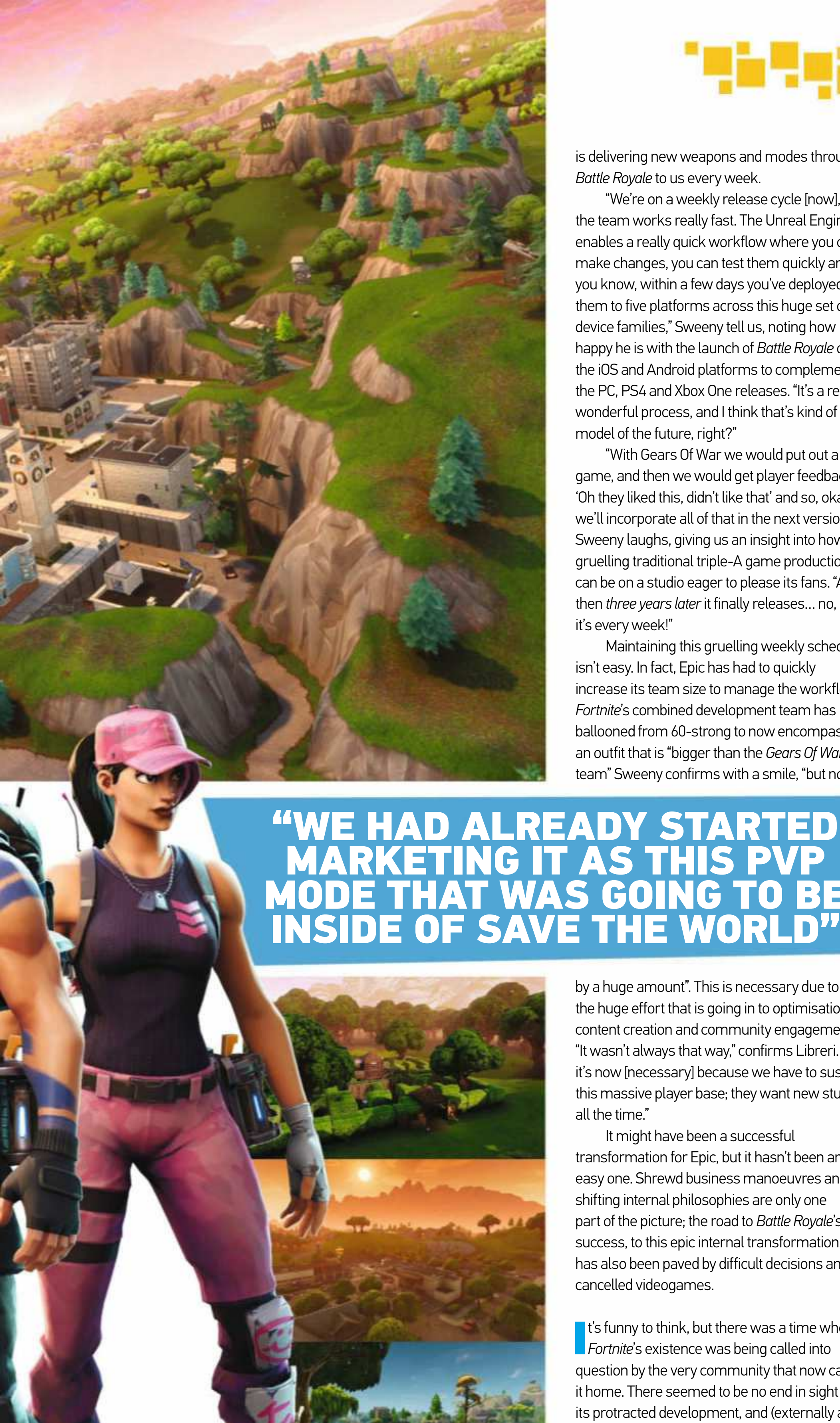
To be fair to him, he isn't wrong. That sort of herculean effort from every department across Epic – from those charged with game creation and optimisation right down to UX designers and marketing – represents an agility and determination that simply isn't reflected in many other 'triple-A' game companies, if any.

So how has Epic found itself in this position? It's been a long, arduous process of self-reflection and transformation. Internally the company refers to itself as Epic 4.0 now, a title that reflects its dedication to pursuing online-experiences and live game development. This process began fives years ago, just ahead of the launch of the PS4 and Xbox One in 2013.

Epic sensed this change on the near horizon. It could see the rise of games-as-a-service and began to pivot its business in pursuit of it. Look back five years ago and you'll find a company with fewer than 100 employees, with an identity largely inseparable from that of the Gears Of War IP.

*Gears Of War: Judgement* would be Epic's final flirtation with a franchise that helped Epic become synonymous with core gamers on the console platform, and effectively established the Unreal Engine 3 as the last generation's most powerful and versatile game creation tool. Many of the company's biggest stars would walk away in search of a fresh start, all of this coming to a head as the ink dried on a contract giving Chinese Internet behemoth Tencent a 40 per cent stake in Epic for an estimated $330 million.

It was a cultural shift as much as it was anything else for Epic – a move made in earnest to get ahead of a trend. To be frank, a game like *Battle Royale* simply wouldn't have been possible without it. The model of traditional game design that served Epic so well in the past was becoming unsustainable, too slow and cumbersome to give the studio any real agility or leverage to respond to increasing demands and interest from players. Epic sensed the development space was quietly shifting beneath its feet, and it knew it needed a response. It's the results of that response that



is delivering new weapons and modes through *Battle Royale* to us every week.

"We're on a weekly release cycle [now], and the team works really fast. The Unreal Engine 4 enables a really quick workflow where you can make changes, you can test them quickly and, you know, within a few days you've deployed them to five platforms across this huge set of device families," Sweeny tell us, noting how happy he is with the launch of *Battle Royale* on the iOS and Android platforms to complement the PC, PS4 and Xbox One releases. "It's a really wonderful process, and I think that's kind of the model of the future, right?"

"With Gears Of War we would put out a game, and then we would get player feedback. 'Oh they liked this, didn't like that' and so, okay, we'll incorporate all of that in the next version," Sweeny laughs, giving us an insight into how gruelling traditional triple-A game production can be on a studio eager to please its fans. "And then *three years later* it finally releases… no, now it's every week!"

Maintaining this gruelling weekly schedule isn't easy. In fact, Epic has had to quickly increase its team size to manage the workflow. *Fortnite*'s combined development team has ballooned from 60-strong to now encompassing an outfit that is "bigger than the *Gears Of War 3* team" Sweeny confirms with a smile, "but not by a huge amount". This is necessary due to the huge effort that is going in to optimisation, content creation and community engagement. "It wasn't always that way," confirms Libreri. "But it's now [necessary] because we have to sustain this massive player base; they want new stuff all the time."

**"WE HAD ALREADY STARTED MARKETING IT AS THIS PVP MODE THAT WAS GOING TO BE INSIDE OF SAVE THE WORLD"**

It might have been a successful transformation for Epic, but it hasn't been an easy one. Shrewd business manoeuvres and shifting internal philosophies are only one part of the picture; the road to *Battle Royale*'s success, to this epic internal transformation, has also been paved by difficult decisions and cancelled videogames.

It's funny to think, but there was a time when *Fortnite*'s existence was being called into question by the very community that now calls it home. There seemed to be no end in sight to its protracted development, and (externally at least) Epic looked to be diverting more and more resources into its community-driven MOBA, Paragon. "You know we poured our hearts and souls into the game. We set out to build a MOBA that had triple-A production values that put you right in the centre of the action," laments Sweeny. "I feel the team really achieved that and did an amazing job building a game that really lived up to that goal."

Sadly for Epic, it wasn't meant to be. The release of *Battle Royale* would act as a surprise death knell for Paragon. With Epic struggling to improve player retention, it made the decision to give fans what they wanted: more of a good thing. By January 2018, most of Paragon's team had moved on to *Battle Royale* – assisting with quality of life improvements to the map, helping to develop new weapons, and get the recently-revealed Replay system into play. Eventually, Epic was forced to shut the MOBA down for good – issuing refunds to the players that had stuck with them over the years and bid farewell to the game that existed in one state or another for three years. "It was kind of a heartbreaking exercise within Epic, to cancel a project that was so dear to our hearts," Sweeny considers. "The difficulty with Paragon is that for every hundred players who came in, a month later less than five were still playing. Over time we made a lot of incremental improvements; we made some big leaps – some were liked, some were hated – but nothing really fundamentally changed those numbers much."

"We came to that realisation after *Fortnite* came out, with numbers that were many-many-many times higher than [Paragon's]. There was just some magic there and the best thing we could do was to put all of our resources into that."

Epic is now fully focused on two distinct areas of business: getting the full *Fortnite* package – encompassing *Save The World* and *Battle Royale* – out of early access as fully-fledged free-to-play games and on continuing to push innovation through its Unreal Engine 4. While these focuses may sound as if they are separate from one another, they are in actuality tied together in a very fundamental way.

The impact *Fortnite*'s sustained growth and expansion could have over the industry is quite unprecedented. When it comes to figuring out what the future holds for *Fortnite*, there's more to consider here than the mere introduction of new maps, modes and weapons to the sprawling carnival of death that is *Battle Royale*. The future of *Fortnite* is intrinsically tied to the future of Epic Games, the Unreal Engine and, in many ways, to the future of the games industry itself.

"*Fortnite* is a leading edge research vehicle for driving the Unreal Engine forward. All of the systems we're building are benefiting everybody," says Sweeny, who is clearly overjoyed that *Fortnite* is finally fulfilling its role – it's hard to believe, but *Fortnite* was, once upon a time, to be the very first game to utilise the Unreal Engine 4. It has effectively become the Gears Of War for the current generation, the tip of the spear, as it were, for showcasing the power and potential »

The speed in which Epic has been able to release updates for *Battle Royale* and *Save The World* is truly impressive. We're particularly impressed by the quality of life improvements it continues to make to the map, improving its points of interest, variety and stability.

Demonstrating its commitment to feeding back any improvements or advancements it makes back into the Unreal Engine, the new and impressive Replay system for *Fortnite* will soon be available on GitHub for other Unreal developers to make use of.

# FORTNITE DOMINATES MOBILE

## WHY BATTLE ROYALE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND IS GOOD FOR GAMERS EVERYWHERE

While much of the conversation surrounding Epic has been on its pivot towards exploring online experiences and live-game development, the studio's engineers have also been quietly focused on bringing hardcore game experiences to mobile platforms.

"The thing that's important to Epic right now is the emergence of serious games for gamers across all platforms, including mobile," says CEO Tim Sweeney, who's elated with the launch of titles such as *Ark: Survival Evolved*, *PUBG* and *Fortnite* on mobile devices to great success.

"We're seeing for the first time in the western world console quality games coming to these mobile devices. The thing we've really been trying to push hard with *Fortnite* is making it possible to play with all of your friends across all platforms," continues Epic CTO Kim Libreri. "So *Fortnite* for iOS isn't just like some teen imported the game; it is the full game live and in sync with the rest of it. You can play with all of your friends on PlayStation, [Xbox], and on PC and MAC and play all together in one session."

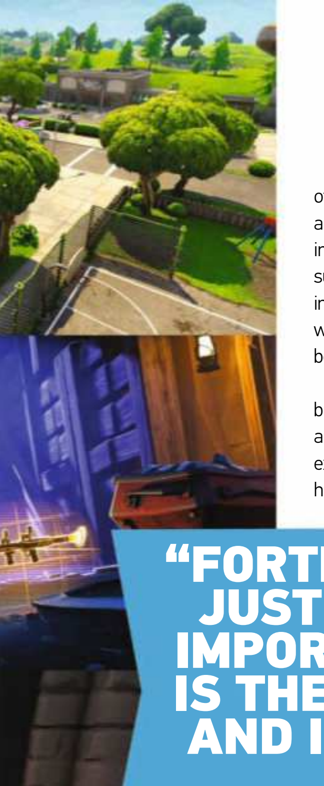
The mobile version of *Fortnite* is, truth be told, incredibly impressive. While the touch controls are a little on the cumbersome side, which is to be expected given the size of the device (the only platforms that support *Fortnite* on mobile thus far are the: iPhone SE, 6S, 7, 8, X; iPad Mini 4, Air 2, 2017, Pro). Elements to help improve movement and control, such as slight auto-aim and more prominent visual cues, help to improve the playing field when engaged in cross-platform play. How has Epic been able to achieve such success? It all comes back to the engine.

"It's the same game. The engine is just super highly optimised, and we put a lot of effort into making sure… we didn't want to make multiple versions of *Fortnite*; we just didn't want to do that," continues Libreri, with Sweeny jumping in to celebrate how great it feels to finally cross such a monumental hurdle for the industry.

"This isn't a low-fidelity indie experience; this is the full game. It's this nine square kilometre island which streams in – it's



just several gigabytes in size – and has a hundred different player characters that can be streamed in. It's absolutely like a high-end PC or console game that now runs on mobile. The hardware is now fantastically able to handle that. This is an awesome thing for gamers."



of the platform, for road testing, demonstrating and distributing huge new innovations for all in the industry to use. "Our business only succeeds when our partners succeed. Our interests are 100 per cent aligned, so anything we can to benefit Unreal engine developers benefits Epic.

"We feel like there's so much synergy in building a game engine and a game together and iteratively improving both based on the experience; that's the best of Epic, that's our history, and that's our future."

**"FORTNITE FOR IOS ISN'T JUST LIKE SOME TEEN IMPORTED THE GAME. IT IS THE FULL GAME, LIVE AND IN SYNC WITH THE REST OF IT"**

We questioned whether Epic now considers *Fortnite* – rather than the Unreal Engine – to be the modern face of the company, just as Unreal Tournament was in the Nineties and Gears Of Wars in the Noughties. Libreri isn't so certain that there's a delineation to be made. "They're not separable, our games and our engine. That's the reason we have such a great engine; we make an engine that benefits everybody," he continues. "If you're making a game that uses the Unreal engine, then you can take advantage of the same stuff as us. We want our customers to make awesome games, and we want to make awesome games. We want an engine that powers that… it's just the way that we think!"

The Unreal Engine 4 is one of the most widely used engines in the industry. It's used by developers such as Bluehole to create *Fortnite* rival *PUBG*, and it is utilised by The Coalition to create *Gears Of War 4*; it powers the incredible competitive VR dogfighter *EVE: Valkyrie* and it's making the ambitious nature of titles such as *Crackdown 3*, *Kingdom Hearts III* and *Sea Of Thieves* all possible. These studios and hundreds of others will ultimately benefit from where Epic is putting its priorities in regards to the future of *Fortnite*.

But what does that future look like? It's difficult to say for certain because Epic itself isn't certain. The studio isn't kidding about its intention of viewing the evolution of *Battle Royale* as an open dialogue; until the conversations are had with the community – be that over social media platforms or through analysing statistical play data – Epic isn't setting anything in concrete.

But you only have to look to what the team has already improved to get a clear sense of where its priorities sit. The team has invested considerable time to improving the core movement and shooting systems, while simultaneously working to stabilise the netcode and optimise the servers; *Fortnite* now runs at a smooth 60 frames-per second on PC, PS4 and Xbox One, vastly improving the feel and functionality of the game. The map has been refined and improved considerably, as too have the weapons, the building mechanics and the progression systems in an effort to improve player retention and its extreme streamability.

For *Battle Royale*'s lead designer this isn't enough though, he believes there is still plenty of work to be done. "We're evaluating the game's shooting model, which is something we tested as part of a Limited Time Mode a while back. We weren't 100 per cent happy with it, and had also been listening to some feedback from players. So we'll continue to look at that, and likely make some changes in the future," confirms Williamson, clearly eager to improve the game for the players without disrupting the key loop and inherent fun that the game can provide. "Now that the core of the game is mostly in place, we're able to have a lot of fun, whether it's new gameplay types, new weapons, or new POIs [points-of-interest]. We'll also look at ways we can improve what's already there, though, whether it's performance or tweaking a mechanic."

The Limited Time Modes remain a point of contention across certain corners of the industry. It's these modes, alongside excellent revisions to the building mechanics and systems, that are breathing new life into the battle royale genre – some have taken umbrage with seeing exciting new modes such as 50 Vs 50 or splitting all 100 players into groups of 20 removed after short spans on the servers. This, Williamson attests, is done with our best interest in mind. "We want that core battle royale experience to always be the focus. We see the Limited Time Modes as a fun palate cleanser, so players can definitely expect more of those in the future," he continues, noting that his team views them as an opportunity to fulfil certain fantasies rather than the direct future of the game type. "We expect some of our Limited Time Modes will speak to certain types of players more than others, and that's okay. The real opportunity is being able to try things that probably wouldn't make sense for our core game modes."

When *Battle Royale* first launched in September, it was difficult to look at it as little more than a cynical attempt to ride on *PUBG*'s (at the time) unprecedented success. But as the months have wound on, as Epic has worked hard to expand on and improve the elements that made *Fortnite* unique to begin with, it began to carve out its own niche within the niche. The building mechanics should never have worked within the setting, and yet they have become the magic ingredient that helps *Fortnite* stand tall above its competition.

"Initially, we just thought it might be fun to add the action building mechanics of *Fortnite* with a battle royale mode. We had a lot of different scenarios in our head on how it would play out, but we weren't sure what it would be like when we put it into action," admits Williamson. "Even early on, there were a lot of people who weren't sure why you'd ever have to use building, especially with the closing circle. Why spend time and resources to build up, when you'd just be forced to leave it behind? But the more we played, the more unique scenarios started to arise. And once we released it, players absolutely floored us with how they were using it, whether it was for traversal, defence, or offense. It's been a lot of fun to watch."

Considerable time and energy has been exerted from the *Fortnite* team to bring quality of life changes to these systems. The recent release of Turbo Building – the ability to quickly and fluidly build structures on the fly – is the biggest indicator yet as to where Epic is positioning its efforts on the development of *Battle Royale*. "Making the 'feel' of building better, especially in fast-paced combat situations, was always something we want to do," says Williamson. "This is particularly important in PvP. Turbo Building, along with automatic material swapping, and being able to build through things, just makes the building seem more fluid. As for how it has changed the game, now players of varying degree of skill can use building more easily. And for high-level players, they're able to do even more now, and hopefully we've alleviated a lot of their frustrations. Like everything else, if we can improve it even more, we're open to taking a look."

Improving the core mechanics ultimately improves the core fun and expands the wealth of situations players might find themselves in (and battling to get out of) throughout the game. All of this will instantaneously feeding back into the iterative development of the Unreal Engine, which in turn will be harnessed by developers all around the world on this generation's biggest and most exciting independent and triple-A videogames. It's this, all of this, that will be key in the months ahead as Epic looks to leave early access behind and take the full *Fortnite* experience to the next level – should such a thing be possible. "Again, the conversation between the players and the development team is really important," concludes Williamson. "It's one of the things that is shaping both games. *Battle Royale* will continue to be free, and *Save The World* will be free in 2018."

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## A BLEND OF TOP-CLASS MANAGEMENT SIM TINKERING AND DINO-RAMPAGING ACTION, JURASSIC WORLD EVOLUTION FINDS A WAY

**It's the ultimate fantasy about the ultimate fantasy – a park simulation videogame, *actually done well*, based on the world created by late author Michael Crichton.** *Jurassic World Evolution* – named for the recent Pratt turn in the franchise, but owing more than its fair share to the original Park and its sequels – feels like such a perfect marriage, it's difficult to imagine what could really go wrong with it. Maybe it will have been rushed in order to release at the same time as the upcoming movie, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*. Maybe it will rely too much on its celebrity appearances, like the glorious Jeff Goldblum reprising his role as Dr Ian Malcolm. Maybe, maybe, *maybe*.

But from some time with *Jurassic World Evolution*, plenty more with Frontier's previous park management title *Planet Coaster*, and with the knowledge of just how many games the studio has made over the past couple of decades featuring parks, animals, or a mix of the two, it's difficult to see the 'maybes' having any real legs. Of course, this might all be a result of the intoxication that washes over a person when they are smack bang in the middle of the ultimate fantasy about the ultimate fantasy. Time will tell. For now, it's all about what *Evolution* might bring us, what we've seen of it so far, and how much *Evolution* manages to be its own thing in the face of the accusations that will do the rounds this is merely a *Planet Coaster* re-skin.

Michael Brookes, game director on *Jurassic World Evolution*, acknowledges Frontier's last game had a big impact on the new one with the terrible lizards: "Obviously [Universal] said they'd seen what we'd done with *Planet Coaster* and various other things, so they knew that we could do a management style game," he says, "However, we very much wanted to *not* do a re-skin of *Planet Coaster*. We think with *Jurassic World* there's an opportunity there to go deeper with the management. You've got [to think about] much more with the dinosaurs, the effects of dinosaurs, things like that, so they had to be stars of the show, not the creative tool. Even though *Planet Coaster* is a management game, it's also this really amazing creative tool, so we wanted to kind of divorce the two and make sure that with *Jurassic World* we focused on actually looking after your dinosaurs and the impact of what looking after the dinosaurs means."

> "WE VERY MUCH WANTED TO *NOT* DO A RE-SKIN OF PLANET COASTER"

From the outset it's clear the dinosaurs do matter a good deal more than you might possibly expect. Starting out on the relatively calm island of Matanceros – first mentioned in the *Lost World* novel – players get used to the systems being thrown their way in a relatively calm, straightforward fashion. Place an enclosure, attach a complex in which you can breed new once-dead creatures, don't forget to power it all up, build your other required facilities (ranger stations, research labs etc) from there – and all that before you've even thought about the requirements of your guests. After all, this is a game about running a *park*, not a private, closed-off research station, so at times you will have to think about things like hamburger shops and selling merchandise with as much of a mark-up as you can without upsetting folks.



As new technologies are researched, opportunities to recreate specific, massive features from the movie series make themselves known. This is begging for a systems failure…

Do you see what's happened? You've forgotten about the dinosaurs, because there's so much else to focus on should you let your mind wander. We bring this up not to criticise, as *Evolution* does a good job of introducing things piece by piece, but because while we were busy faffing about trying to perfectly place a t-shirt shop, one of our herbivores broke through a non-electrified fence and went to work terrorising the humans loitering about outside. Looking after dinosaurs matters more than anything else, despite what some voices in your ear might shout as they're demanding you up security levels or squeeze more profit from the attending public. And we hadn't been paying attention to our lone Edmontosaurus. It wasn't surprising she became unhappy, lacking in any social contact as she was – what with being the only one of her kind to exist in the last 66 million years. That's a level of loneliness sure to make anyone mad.

It sounds like micromanagement, but it really isn't – hover over your attractions, and you'll see meters measuring hunger, thirst, social happiness and other such elements. Keep an eye on it, and you'll always – well, usually – be able to nip things in the prehistoric, giant bud before they get out of hand. But you do have to remember all the time that these are animals with their own wants and needs, their own individual personalities – to an extent – and there's no one-size approach to the different species. "To progress through the game you need to be fairly sensible with what you do," Brookes says, "Because if you went and opened the gates in your paddocks then the dinosaurs would walk out. They are dangerous to humans. Even the herbivores are a threat to humans – they will trample people into the ground."



Michael Brookes was executive producer on *Elite: Dangerous* and has been at Frontier for over 15 years, going all the way back to *Dog's Life*.

Keeping gigantic lizard/birds happy could be an exercise in futility – and *Evolution* does cater to those wanting to just mess things up and relive the movies on their own terms, though more on that later – and it will take some learning to get things running smoothly: "You could have all kinds of causes," Brookes explains, "If you're not feeding them; if they become sick; if there aren't enough others of their kind – many of the dinosaurs are quite social. They expect to see others of their kind. Others worry if there are too many other dinosaurs close to them, so if you get overcrowded that can be a problem. And then they can just try and escape!"

Of course, what would a *Jurassic World* – or *Park* – game be without the presence of the Tyrannosaurus Rex, the 'should-be-Deinonychus' Velociraptors, or any of your other meat-feasting bipedal bastards? Nothing, and of course you can clone yourself any number of carnivorous dinos to populate the park. In fact, you'll find yourself wanting to do so, as they're more exciting for visitors to see, and so bring in more money. They also bring in more danger. "The more dangerous dinosaurs will actively seek to try and escape their enclosures if they're not happy," Brookes laughs.

The basic point being made is that *Jurassic World Evolution* has a lot of layers to it, and a lot of ways in which it can appeal to players. There's those who might just want to breed and maintain dinosaur populations, as Frontier knows: "That's something we really wanted to be aware of, is because, yes, it's good to have a challenge to the game, but you don't want to make it frustrating," Brookes says, "I mean, there are a lot of players who, to an extent, they prefer just to have a sandbox game just to see that they can manage a large number of dinosaurs. So for that, they can stick with Matanceros. They can explore the other islands and start getting the other unlocks, but they can keep coming back and building on Matanceros, to do what it is they want." But this is a game in the Jurassic Park universe – there's a story behind everything, and without the intrigue, the push-and-pull between scientific breakthroughs and ethical dilemmas, the unmitigated greed of a wide-eyed investor with dollar signs on the horizon, it wouldn't really be fit for purpose.

> "THERE WAS THIS BIG ELEMENT OF TRUST THAT WE'RE WORKING WITH SOMETHING VERY VALUABLE TO THEM"

John Zuur Platten is the lead writer on *Jurassic World Evolution*, and has credits on the likes of *Fear Effect* and *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*. His job was to integrate a fitting, gripping, dip in-and-out-able storyline to

## Transferable Skills

THIS ISN'T FRONTIER'S FIRST FORAY INTO PARK-BASED GAMES



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### ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 2004
**PC/MAC**

By the time the third game came around, Frontier was very much in charge of this particular Tycoon branch. Add-ons followed, all high points for the series.



### THRILLVILLE 2006
**PS2/XBOX/X360/PSP/WII/PC**

Including the *Off The Rails* sequel, this console-focused park sim had some great points – mainly the mini-games – but was bogged down in boring busywork.



### KINECTIMALS 2010
**X360**

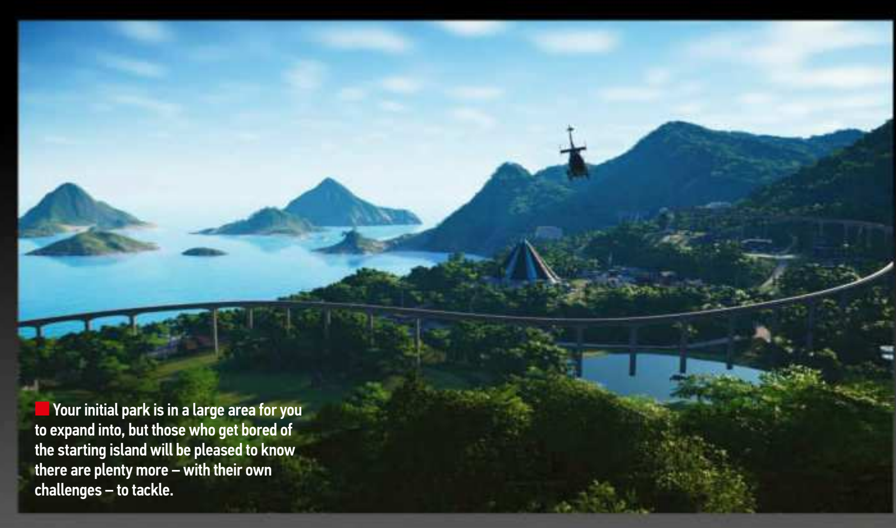
More a park experience than a management sim, *Kinectimals* nonetheless continued Frontier's trend for basing its games in places full of cages and ticket gates.

*Evolution* in a way that fits the series' ethos while at the same time not overwhelming things. "What I look at my job as being," he explains, "is sort of setting the table, providing context for the player, for what they're about to experience, but the individual story-beats, they create those. Every game that I write, I always imagine that I'm collaborating with the player, because the player is revealing that story the way they're playing the game. Many games of *Evolution*, you're creating your own story, so it's a balancing act – but, there are also linear narrative story beats that happen through branches you can explore."

Those branches – science, entertainment and security – offer up mini-missions for the player that focus on the different elements and provide boosts to technology and discoveries associated with them. Focus on security, for example, and you'll end up with far fewer Edmontosaurus rampages under your belt – but the park will feel more like a dino-prison than somewhere visitors actually want to spend any time. Each branch brings its own philosophies to the table, and it's a balancing act to keep every faction as happy as it can be in order for everything to be running smoothly as you go. It's almost as if someone's watched the original movie and noticed one Dennis Nedry was a sort-of faction within the story who wasn't kept happy, and so who moved against his employer to sabotage the operation. And it's *almost* as if that kind of thing might happen in *Evolution* too, given enough neglect towards one or two factions. Oh, and remember not to forget about the dinosaurs.

This kind of complexity requires a baby steps approach to things, and Frontier is embracing the fact that, even with the robust storyline pushing players through everything, there is the chance to methodically work through things, to return to previous parks and upgrade them, to concentrate on the distinctly *gamey* aspects of *Evolution*. "The main approach taken was that we have the progression through the islands, as you progress then you unlock new gameplay, but you also unlock new challenges," Brookes says, "So you're slowly building up this library of tools that you can use to respond to emergencies, or preemptively plan ahead for them… Then we encourage you to go back through the islands to try and complete them fully, using all the new things that you've learned, and to try unlock everything."

As you work your way through the islands, the challenge builds in numerous ways – one obvious way being the weather, which becomes far harsher on other islands and necessitates storm warning centres and preparation for weather events. »



Your initial park is in a large area for you to expand into, but those who get bored of the starting island will be pleased to know there are plenty more – with their own challenges – to tackle.







You can keep as few or as many different species in a single enclosure as you see fit. Do you want convenience, or safer animals? It's up to you.



**KINECT: DISNEYLAND ADVENTURES 2011**
**X360**
Frontier's first combo of theme park gaming and a huge license, *Kinect Disneyland* was near enough ignored by the hardcore – and adored by young children around the world.



**COASTER CRAZY/ DELUXE 2012**
**WII U/IOS**
Starting out life on the iPhone, *Coaster Crazy*'s sequel hit Wii U to little fanfare in 2013. It's set in a theme park, and that's about all you can say for it.



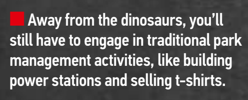
**ZOO TYCOON 2013**
**XBOX ONE/X360**
A park sim with wide appeal, *Zoo Tycoon* was fun initially, but soon ran out of steam as its shallow nature made itself apparent. Still, it was a step in the right direction for console sims.



**SCREAMRIDE 2015**
**XBOX ONE/X360**
Stripping away much of the business and replacing it with construction, Frontier nailed the appeal of rollercoasters-in-games with *Screamride*. Surely there'd be no return to 'proper' business sims now?



**PLANET COASTER 2016**
**PC**
Except there was, and it was – and is – epic. *Planet Coaster* knocked it out of the – wait for it – playing field with one of the best park management games since the *Rollercoaster Tycoon* heyday.


Away from the dinosaurs, you'll still have to engage in traditional park management activities, like building power stations and selling t-shirts.



A dinosaur's social level matters for a good deal of the creatures, especially herbivores. Keep them happy by giving them friends, or pay the price.





## THE JURASSIC PERIODS

THERE WAS A SMALL GAP BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND…












| | |
|---|---|
| 145 MILLION YEARS AGO | Jurassic period |
| 66 MILLION YEARS AGO | Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event |
| 1993 | Jurassic Park, cinema |
| 1993/94 | Jurassic Park, various |
| 1995 | Jurassic Park 2: The Chaos Continues, SNES/GB |
| 1997 | Chaos Island: The Lost World, PC |
| 1997 | The Lost World: Jurassic Park, PS/ Saturn/MD/Arcade/ handhelds |
| 1998 | Trespasser, PC |





A stray lightening strike on a power substation without enough redundancies in place, and you've got yourself fences a great deal easier to chew through than they were mere seconds before. It's a particularly game-y element, of course, but another way in which Frontier has managed to weave something from the world of gaming with the core concepts of the movies on which it's based: chaos.

Now, you're not going to see a Chaos-o-meter at the top of the screen, nor is Jeff Goldblum's job in-game to tell you when something chaotic is about to happen. It's not that obvious. But you are looking at a series of complex systems layered on top of each other, where weak links can form. If one breaks – it might be the aforementioned substation with no redundancies – there's always the chance this chaos will cascade, leading to more ill effects on top of more problems, sprinkled with more issues. Of course, this sounds like hell and the kind of thing that could result in many a controller thrown at a wall – but it's entirely in keeping with the Jurassic series' ethos, and the way in which one leads to another, and onto more bad shit. There's also the fact that some will play *for* this chaos – we've been doing it since purposefully causing earthquakes and Godzilla rampages in the original *Sim City* – it's unlikely to stop now we're on the verge of what could be the best park building simulation the Jurassic franchise has ever seen. Sometimes you just want to see truly ancient nature clash head-on with the products of millions of years of evolution. That's just *Jurassic World*, *Jurassic Park*, the Jurassic franchise – everything Michael Crichton and, latterly, Universal has always been about with this world. And park.

> "THE DEVELOPMENT STUDIO BEHIND IT HAS BEEN MAKING GAMES ABOUT ANIMALS, PARKS, AND ANIMALS IN PARKS FOR JUST ABOUT TWO DECADES"

Everyone working at Frontier is full of high praise for license holders Universal – "They realised what we could do with one of their huge franchises," Brookes says, "So there was this big element of trust that we're working with something very valuable to them." The studio provided the team access to audio, 3D models, animations and more to make the job of creating a park-creator as accurate as it can be. But there always has to be *something* about a game based on such a blockbuster franchise that offers at least a vigorous nod towards its (part-)action roots. Fortunately for *Jurassic World Evolution*, this nod fits – and it's fun. What it *is*, is direct control – say a dinosaur becomes out of control, and you need to send in a team to tranquilise the beast for its own good (and to protect profits). You can do this with a few clicks or button presses and let it be carried out by the AI. *Or*, you can dive right in to the action, controlling the helicopter as it makes its way to the rampaging animal and the sedation sniper as they hang out from the chopper's side – a mini-game of target practice to calm nature's fury, no less.

There's also the chance to control Jeep-bound rangers to administer cures to ailing dinosaurs, and likely other elements we weren't privy to with our time on the game so far. It initially feels like an odd addition, but it does work – and you can see why it's in there. "The direct action thing, I think, was a consequence of actually coming from *Jurassic World*," Brookes says, "Where they have these hero moments, where the person actually starts running around in her high heels, and just actively *doing something* about it. We wanted to include that in the game. Plus it gives you a new perspective on how you're looking at your dinosaurs, when you're driving around in a four-by-four for one, looking at the Brachiosaur walking past, that's quite an impressive sight.

"It gets you that human scale interaction as well, but also it means that when these disasters happen, that you can actually respond to it. And if you know what you're doing, you can respond much quicker than the AI can. You can use research to improve your response teams, but sometimes you just want to jump in, that you'd rather do it yourself." It's just one of those things that wouldn't work were it a less experienced developer behind the action – that would probably result in a game focused on action, demanding interaction from the player and penalising them for not getting their hands dirty. As Frontier presents it, you *can* help, and it is fun, and it works well – but you absolutely do not have to if you don't want to.

Frankly, *Jurassic World Evolution* could well turn out to be a missed opportunity. Maybe. We can't keep that thought off the table from just a short amount of time with the game at a well organised, showy press event. But at the same time there's very little working against it as a project – the franchise it's based on is strong and the game isn't being limited just to the recent movies, with the classic original (and its two barely watchable follow-ups) featured and referenced with aplomb. The development studio behind it has been making games about animals, parks, and animals in parks for just about two decades now, and its jumping off point of *Planet Coaster* – while it's keen to distance *Evolution* from 'just being a re-skin' – is a brilliant one. And it's got Jeff Goldblum in it, muttering his sweet, staccato streams of consciousness into your ears. If it all comes together, if nature – and Frontier – finds a way, we could well end up with a truly rare sight in the gaming species: a genuinely great movie tie-in.

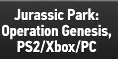


**1999**
Warpath: Jurassic Park, PS



**2001**
Jurassic Park III, various





**2003**
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis, PS2/Xbox/PC



**2011**
Jurassic Park: The Game, PS3/X360/PC/iOS



**2012**
Jurassic Park Builder, iOS/Android/Facebook



**2015**
Jurassic Park Arcade, Arcade





**2015**
Lego Jurassic World, various



**2018**
Jurassic World Evolution, PC/PS4/Xbox One



# 15 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT NINTENDO LABO™

WE BREAK DOWN SOME OF THE INCREDIBLE FACTS AROUND THE SWITCH'S REVOLUTIONARY NEW ACCESSORY KITS

**N**intendo's latest exciting venture is launching 20 April 2018, and it has so much more about it than most people seem to understand. This isn't just a few sheets of cardboard being sold to you for £60, but a full suite of tools and software that can unlock the imagination of children and those with child-like appreciation of simpler gaming pleasures. Nintendo Labo will be best appreciated and enjoyed by younger players, but with adult supervision and, used as a project that the family can all jump into together, this has the potential to be a much more communal experience than most things we've seen on Switch thus far. With all of that in mind we thought we would break down some of the most important things we think you should know about Nintendo Labo as it lands on the Switch.



## INHERITOR OF THE WII SPIRIT

**1** The Wii U may have been the follow-up to Nintendo's monumental and revolutionary system, but the Switch is the true successor to the motion control icon, and Labo is the most succinct expression of this. By this we mean that the Wii's lasting legacy was not motion controls in themselves, but breaking down the barrier to entry to playing games and making them something families could enjoy together, and these cardboard kits do something very similar. Labo is something to be experienced together, built together and played together. That's pretty much been a part of the Nintendo mission statement for the last couple of decades, and it remains true with the Nintendo Switch.

## IT MAKES MORE USE OF THE SWITCH

**2** The Nintendo Switch has so much more functionality and adaptability than any game released so far has really taken advantage of. And that's not a knock of any games that have been released so far, as if any single game attempted using all the features the sum total would be a complete mess. From motion control to the IR camera and from the touchscreen to the HD rumble in the Joy-Cons, there's a lot there to dig into, and Nintendo Labo is fully capable of making the most of all of it. Every facet of the console has been utilised to make the various minigames currently available with the Labo kits as varied and enjoyable as possible.




## IT'S ABOUT THE BUILD AS MUCH AS THE PLAY

**3** Not unlike working on a new LEGO kit, Labo is going to be as much about making the Toy-Con as it will be about playing the games they associate with. This is very much aimed at families, and most especially at young children working with supervision to make a Toy-Con and then sharing the gaming experience together. Some of the builds are thought to take a fair amount of time as well, so the experience of making the controllers and setting up the game has to be a fun one. Thankfully the simple layouts of the cardboard kits should make finding the right pieces and making it all fit together far easier than hunting around for the correct length of brick, as with other toys.





## THE APP MAKES IT EASY

**4** One of the great advantages the Switch has as a tool for construction kits is that the app can walk you through as your instruction manual, and it offers a lot more interactivity than a piece of paper ever could. Every stage of the construction of the various kits is there for you, and in 3D, so you can touch the screen to rotate your view and see how the Toy-Con goes together from every angle. The instruction guides are meticulously put together so that you don't miss a single step in the build, although that also means they can be a little slow to get through. Bottom line is that while it may take patience, it is built to avoid frustration and answer any questions you may have as you go.

■ **While the base functionality of a Toy-Con may be obvious enough at first, there's almost always a surprise lurking in there somewhere. Take, for instance, the Robot pack and the ability to transform into a car just by kneeling down.**

## THE STICKERS ARE THE SECRET

**5** If you've been wondering how exactly all of the mechanical magic of Labo is pulled off, from how it registers the playing of keys on a piano to how it reads the yanking of cords in the Robot kits to create movement, it's all in the stickers. All of the Labo kits come with special reflective stickers, and they're not just there for decoration. Thanks to the IR camera these reflective stickers can be picked up even in complete darkness by the Joy-Con, and it is these points of reference that the games then use to read movements and translate them into action. So the piano keys use stickers to translate movement to sound and the Robot uses stickers to translate cords going up and down into attacks.

## SO MUCH CREATIVITY IN THE MINIGAMES

**6** One of the things we've been most impressed with from the Labo kits is the breadth of content they actually offer. As we've mentioned, they make full use of every facet of the console, but more than that they've actually applied those functions to fun in-game mechanics that make the games feel as interactive and tactile as possible. They manage to blur the lines between digital reality and the real world very nicely. This might best be displayed in the House build as part of the Variety kit, where the motion tracking, tilting and touch of the Switch can all come into play, as well as the IR functionality for reading inputs inside the box.



## IT'S SO MUCH DEEPER THAN YOU THINK

7 While a common criticism we've seen of the games attached to the Robot kit and Variety kit is that they are rather shallow, if anything we were rather impressed with their depth. For instance, if we were to compare them to the games that came with *Wii Sports*, the Nintendo Labo titles compare quite favourably. While the House and Fishing Rod are relatively simple, their core gameplay loop is a lot of fun to explore and play with. Meanwhile, the Bike and Piano offer a lot more gameplay potential than the base playing experience might first let on. There's a lot of extra stuff you can do in these games.

## MAKE YOUR OWN TRACK

8 With the Bike game as part of the Variety kit you can make your own tracks from scratch. This includes being able to scan the shapes of objects with the IR camera to have them form the base topographic layout of a course. And then, using a Joy-Con placed in a small bike-shaped folder, you can trace out the shape of a track in the air by tilting the Joy-Con, and the game will translate that into a raceway for you. That the game can then be enjoyed in multiplayer and shared with others only makes it more compelling. So, while the base game may be limited in gameplay and track selections, the potential to be creative yourself is there to dig into.

## DESIGN AND CUT YOUR OWN CHARACTERS

9 Building on the ability to scan objects with the IR camera, the fishing minigame actually makes use of that ability too, as you can design, cut out and scan in your own fish shapes for the game and then attempt to catch them, adding them to your aquarium. While this is a relatively simple application of the technique, it opens up some exciting opportunities for the future, as it could allow you to design your own Labo kits, scan them and have them made. Or just create more complex characters or items for future games. This tech could just as easily be applied to non-Labo products in the future too. Frankly, this little reveal has got our minds racing.



# THERE'S EVEN A MUSIC STUDIO

**10** The Piano is probably the Toy-Con from the Variety kit that has the greatest potential longevity, thanks to the fact that it features a full music creation tool. While plugging in different knobs to the top of the piano can change the sound of your keys, going into the music creation mode means you can customise the keyboard entirely, record tunes, create sound waves by cutting out pieces of paper, create rhythms with punch cards and a lot more. You can also place a Joy-Con on top of any empty vessel (a cardboard box, for instance) and playing the keys will cause vibrations to play sounds from it, like a makeshift speaker. It's a stunning addition to the kit that means that anyone with a taste for music-making can come back again and again to the game and keep finding new things.



**We're completely bowled over by the depth of functionality offered by the Piano Toy-Con kit. It's utterly stunning to us how much you can do with it.**



**Nintendo is pushing Labo as an experience that is best shared both in construction and when playing the games. There shouldn't be anything in their too hazardous, but building together can be very satisfying.**

# THE TOY-CON GARAGE IS NEXT LEVEL

**11** All of the building and tinkering with cardboard is interesting and has lots of potential for the future, but it's the toolset hiding in the Labo app that has us as excited as anything else. The Toy-Con Garage offers a full suite of tools to make your own experience with the Switch with a simple input/output command system. This means that you can do things like tell the Switch screen to light up when you move the analogue stick up or have the right Joy-Con vibrate when the left Joy-Con is shaken. There are lots of little command variations that can be matched with dozens of output reactions to create interesting new relationships between the various pieces of the Switch.

# MAKE ENTIRELY NEW GAMES

**12** What having the Toy-Con Garage means in real terms is that you can create your own games. What do we mean by that? Well for a start you can remix the Toy-Con games you already have, such as using the Fishing Rod to control a RC Tank or using the House design to control a music box. But, more than that, you can make entirely new ideas with the cardboard and commands at your disposal. Set up the right inputs and outputs and you can create simple AI responses and combinations of movement that make brand-new games to play. Break away from the templates and the potential to make things of your own is massive.

## THE NODE CONTROL CAN GET COMPLEX

13 As you might expect, if you want to make an entirely new type of game then the input and output combinations might begin to get a little more complex, but Labo can handle that. One example we've seen involves remixing a targeting system already available through the IR camera that causes a cardboard figure to vibrate and fall when it's spotted by another Joy-Con in a RC Tank model. By adding additional instructions the vibration can be controlled by a button press rather than just being spotted, spotting the figure can cause an alarm to sound instead and additional sound effects can be added for 'firing' and falling. Combine it all together and you have a complete experience.

## YOU MAY WANT MORE JOY-CONS

14 One thing to pick up on is that with all of the different input and output options available and the way they can be paired with various Toy-Cons already available, you may want to get some additional Joy-Cons to sync with your Switch. Having at least another pair should open up a lot more options, as it gives you another IR camera to work with and can potentially open up some multiplayer game ideas for you. And with the extra Joy-Cons you can definitely create more complex and involved command structures to deliver even more engaging and exciting game ideas for everyone to enjoy.



**Plugging in additional bolts to a Toy-Con can unlock brand new features or customise the experience how you want it to play. There's much more depth to the creation tools than you might think.**



## THE POTENTIAL APPEARS LIMITLESS

15 Nintendo Labo has an incredibly low barrier to entry, which is great because it's intended to be appealing to craft-loving kids who care about building things as much as playing with things. But what's really exciting to us is how much further it can go. Of course, Nintendo will be launching additional kits over time. The Variety and Robot kits are just the opening offer, but more will be on the way, with even more complex and exciting ideas attached. But, between those releases a Labo community is bound to rise up and begin sharing fun new ideas that can make even more from the tools made available. Expect cardboard templates for new devices to spread quickly and command lists for fun new games to appear on message boards. We're convinced this is going to be huge.

# KNIGHTS AND BIKES

**We speak exclusively to Knights And Bikes creators Rex Crawle and Moo Yu about their upcoming RPG and the endless inspiration of childhood**

There's a period of time as a child where every venture out through the front door is an odyssey. Whether you're fully conscious of what your true destination is or whether you have a destination in mind at all, stepping through that portal of safety and out into the world is a step into the unknown and, perhaps as a kind of defence mechanism, we turn it into something grand, bold and heroic. Or at least we did, and so did *Knights And Bikes* creators Rex Crawle and Moo Yu.

"It was very loose," former *Tearaway* creative lead Crawle says of the initial concept for *Knights And Bikes*. "It was 'What would a *Goonies* RPG be like?'. That was the initial starting point. Although we stay true to that and it definitely helps with a Kickstarter to be able to say '*Goonies*' to get people excited, bearing in mind that this was before *Stranger Things* came along and ripped off the *Goonies* as well. We had this idea of controlling a gang of kids and sending them on treasure-hunting adventures, but the more time we spent with the idea the more we identified the various strengths, and in particular which of the characters in the gang we liked most, and really honed it down into its own standalone project."

The *Goonies* spirit then, more than the plot points of the film itself, is what the duo is attempting to tap into with their indie venture Foam Sword. They bring with them over a decade of game development experience each, from studios like Media Molecule (where they worked together), Lionhead and Insomniac, as well as indie projects, mobile companies and social media startups. But now they wanted to, "have some time to go around each other's houses and play at making a videogame together," as Crawle puts it.

"I've definitely oscillated between indie and studio life all the time where I go indie and start a project and then realise I don't know any of the things that I need to know, then I go to a studio and keep that in mind to see which one of those things I can learn at the studio," gameplay programmer Yu tells us. "When I did the Facebook startup, which Rex was part of as well, I realised I knew nothing about the business side of things, so quickly after that I joined a Silicon Valley startup and then I joined Mind Candy because obviously they could teach me a lot about business. Once I had been through all of that I felt a little bit more confident about trying it all again for *Knights And Bikes*."

So, what is this indie project all about? Essentially it's an RPG inspired by the games, both digital and real life, that Crawle and Yu played as children themselves, like *Secret Of Mana* and *EarthBound*. It's a game that sees two young girls head out around their home island of Penfurzy, where adults are going missing. This is where some of the *Goonies* spirit comes into play, as the adventures of these kids may just be what saves the island and its inhabitants against all odds.

So, what we have is a beautiful wheel of influence as childhood experience and memories merge with influential games and movies to feed back into an experience about being a kid that plays like the class c games of old.

"It's also about thinking of ways to break out of that as well," Crawle insists. "We don't want it to be an echo chamber where we're purposefully recreating those games. For instance, our two main characters are girls, and we're trying to push ourselves in some different directions by going for that decision so that we're not just putting ourselves in the game."

But those influences are very personal, as Yu tells us. "So much of childhood was focused around videogames. The friend who I think about the most when I'm making this game is a friend called Won, a Korean guy rather the typical Juan you would meet in Southern California, but the way I met him was that he had just moved to our block and he literally for the first three days would spend five or six hours riding around the block, and to every kid he saw he would stop them and say 'Do you have Nintendo? Yes? Then we can be friends'. And he would write down your address and then the next week he would come back and check what games you had and what games he had and what you wanted to trade with, what you wanted to play together, that kind of stuff."

And for years to come Yu and Won would reunite to play *Secret Of Mana*. "I remember specifically in *Secret Of Mana* there was a boss that was just a wall with a face on it and Won could never beat that with the AI characters," he continues. "So any time Won started a run on *Secret Of Mana*, you know that two days from then Won's going to call you and say, 'I need some help on wall face! The sprite just won't cast the spells correctly!'." »


NOTICE OF EVICTION
DEATH JOUST

The full back stories of Nessa and Demelza are something we imagine we'll need to wait for the final release to find out, but we do know that Nessa is new to the island, so Demelza will know it and possibly its inhabitants a little better.

Rex Crawle has name checked the artwork of Eric Carle, famous for the children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, as an inspiration behind the game's gorgeously textured and layered backgrounds. Nothing appears to be a single shade anywhere in the game.

# LOTS OF PAINTING REX CRAWLE TALKS KNIGHTS AND BIKES ART STYLE

## THE CHARACTER DESIGN

"I try to draw attractive people, it just never quite comes out that way [laughs]. I definitely try to put a lot of the elements of the adults I grew up around in my Cornish farmhouse upbringing. Everyone was kind of craggy. There were a lot of characters. A lot of big personalities who had quite strange styles of dress or manners of speaking or hobbies, like building dinosaurs out of scrap metal and all of these strange things. I'm definitely trying to bring some of that in as well. And it's kind of fun to think about how the kids are going to perceive these characters as well, particularly as one of the main characters doesn't come from the island, so she's seeing things a little differently."



## THE CONSTANT BACKGROUND MOVEMENT

"For the art style I wanted it to look a little bit like the kids had drawn it themselves or at the very least art directed it. They're coming up with all of these ideas and changing their minds and telling all of these stories and I'm just trying to keep up with everything that they're telling me to paint next. That movement plays into that kind of stop-motion animation, so wherever possible I try to draw everything three times and then just cycle through those frames so that it's just constantly moving. That movement can transfer on to the player. When you're playing if everything is alive and moving it gives you an energy yourself to keep moving. Essentially it's just trying to convey that energy and imagination of kids. But yeah, it just takes a lot of painting basically."



Riding around on your bike is going to be a lot of fun. As you can see, you can leave trails and skid around on them, upgrade them with different flags and more. Your bike is one of your major signposts of progress through the game.










All of that is now filtered through the experience of making games like *LittleBigPlanet* and *Tearaway*. "It's the experience that we had 15 or 20 years ago processed through us growing up, and a decade each of game-making experience," Yu adds. "Something else that seems almost entirely different comes out at the other side from what we actually experienced in the first place."

But childhood game influence is only one part of what makes *Knights And Bikes,* as the other, more significant part is building out from childhood experience and turning it into game mechanics. Paramount among those is the role of the titular bikes. "I think a really key thing in *The Goonies*, in *E.T.* and in *Knights And Bikes*, are bikes and the way that when you get your first bike that's when as a kid you first have a little bit of independence," says Crawle. "That's very much the kind of feeling that we want to get into the game, where you start out in a relatively safe environment, you slowly get away from that parental influence."

And so for Demelza and Nessa, our heroes in *Knights And Bikes*, their wheels are at the heart of the experience. As you travel around the island and help its inhabitants you will earn upgrades for the bikes, building them out into more and more powerful vehicles to take on the next challenge. And where in the real world adding reflectors, pinning streamers or placing a card in the spokes is just a cosmetic upgrade, in the game it will have a real impact, the way as kids we liked to pretend that doing these things made us faster or allowed our bikes to fly. And all of this needs to be bought in game with the kinds of treasures that a kid would care about.

"My particular favourite one is the Owl Pellets," Crawle tells us. "I don't know how many of our target demographic have dissected an owl pellet before, but I definitely used to, and it's fun to find all of the bones and bits of mice that are tucked away inside what an owl had regurgitated. It's just trying to be as creative as possible with having some really weird things that you collect and some slightly more relatable things that you can find, like buttons and badges and earthworms. Essentially we're trying to simulate the pockets of a kid's trousers [laughs]. That's such a weird thing. That's a strange genre to have created."

Spending these items may prove a little tricky, however. "We kind of have fun with them in the game in that these items are currency and ultimately you do have to go and barter with some adults in order to upgrade your bike and they're obviously expecting you to turn up with a couple of ten pound notes in your pocket and you turn up and empty a giant bag of worms and maggots and owl pellets and things all over their shop counter," continues Crawle. "And then you try and convince them that they should give you some sort of sweet upgrade for your bike. It's a real moment of child world meets the harsh financial realities of adult life."

> "Essentially we're trying to simulate the pockets of a kid's trousers"
> Rex Crawle

This is just one way in which fantasy and reality collide in an interesting way in *Knights And Bikes*, many of which are very much to the benefit of Demelza and Nessa on their adventures. The way that Foam Sword has taken classic childhood mindsets and behaviour and turned it into gameplay mechanics is very exciting.

"I think the main thing we focused on was making sure that the girls' abilities interacted with one another so that you could do these combo things," says Yu. "One of the first sets of weapons that we made were Demelza's wellies and Nessa's water balloons. The basic mechanic there was that Demelza can do a ground-pound that would do a bit of damage and a bit of area of attack, but obviously if Nessa lays down a big water balloon and Demelza pops it and jumps in that puddle she can do a big splash and affect a lot more things." And what child can resist jumping in a puddle with their wellies on?

"It's just simple things, like Nessa can throw her Frisbee and Demelza can give it a quick kick with her boots if she times it perfectly," adds Crawle. "And it doesn't necessarily help in a massive way – it makes the Frisbee go a bit further – but there's something a bit fun about when you learn that."

"I guess we kind of learned this on *LittleBigPlanet*, but there's always a joy when you design something »



## First Wheels

We talked to Rex Crawle and Moo Yu about the importance of a kid's first bike, so we asked when they got theirs



Rex Crawle: My first bike I had at a very young age, probably about three years old. It was very tiny, bright yellow and with stabilisers on. I soon outgrew the bike, but my dad gradually customised it, as he's quite artful with a welding torch. He added on extra pieces of pipe to raise the seat and handlebars far beyond their original heights. So basically it became a kind of teetering tiny-bicycle/siege-tower combo. With stabilisers on.



Moo Yu: I was on the opposite side of the age spectrum. I got my first bike when I was nine. It was some weird knock-off Chinese branded thing handed down from one of the church kids. It was dark red with a super-wide frame (I think trying to make it look like a motorcycle). My dad procured some bright-green training wheels from who knows where and stuck them on. Being the last kid on the block to get a bike, it wasn't pretty but I was glad to finally join the fun.



# What's in a Name?

## Where do the names Nessa and Demelza come from?

We love the names of the heroes in *Knights And Bikes*, but wondered where they came from. Interestingly, neither of them is from where many have speculated. "I think one thing we should say is that [Nessa's] got nothing to do with Ness from *EarthBound*, and Moo was really horrified because we just hadn't made the connection at all and someone made it on the Kickstarter or something," Crawle tells us. "But then Demelza is named after a little village very close to where I grew up. It's this tiny little place. There were only 26 people in my entire school and I think three of them were called Demelza. It was a really popular name where I grew up. There's probably not that many schools that have that proportion of Demelzas, but there were a lot of them that year. But again, since we've been working on this, *Poldark* was relaunched and has a strong Demelza character as well, and some people have asked, 'Oh, did that come from *Poldark*?' and I have been similarly pissed off, as if I had just nicked it off BBC One on a Saturday night. But essentially everyone in the game has a Cornish place name as a name. So, there are a whole bunch of other people who are named after places near where I used to hang out."

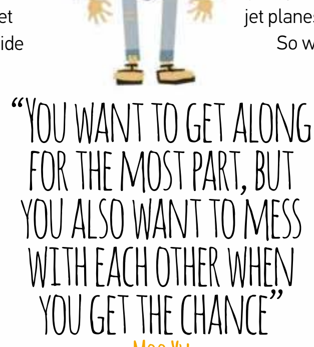



for mostly working together, but then you put those little hints of working against each other as well," Yu picks up. "So, as Rex mentioned, Demelza can kick Nessa's Frisbees, and Nessa only has one Frisbee, so if you keep kicking that Frisbee she's never going to get it back, and she can't do anything until she gets it back. Just like how you are as kids, you want to get along for the most part, but you also want to mess with each other when you get the chance."

To test that these abilities stand up on their own, they even stripped the game down to test them in isolation, like two kids finding a way to have fun in an empty space. "The two of us have just stood around on a field with nothing there and I've just been throwing Frisbees and Moo's been kicking them and kicking them towards me or kicking them further away," Crawle explains. "We kind of had a milestone a while back where we just wanted to make sure that even in a completely blank level you could still have fun between the two of you and all of the abilities that you have."

And this will even be tested while you're on an adventure, as the kids get a little distracted or decide to play a side game as they travel. From races to objectives to treasure hunts, the girls will constantly be egging each other on and having fun as well as searching the island to uncover the mystery that threatens its citizens. "Just like we want to make sure that even in an empty room you can have fun with the game, it just reminds us how children can entertain themselves at any point by making up games; defining rules and challenging each other really are recurring themes," Yu explains. "As a child these things are very, very real to you and of critical importance in the moment, capturing that idea of having a lot of entertainment in the game in an environment that might not actually provide that for you."

One of our favourite additions to the experience that plays into this child's-eye view of the world comes through the sound design, where Crawle and Yu sought some assistance from former *LittleBigPlanet* and *Tearaway* colleague Kenny Young. "He's fantastic to work with because he has incredible attention to detail," Crawle tells us. "Any time he comes to join the project – because he's not on it full-time – it's a really nice moment because everything we've created is suddenly presented back to us in a new way. It's sometimes hard to maintain a bit of distance when you're working on something so closely. But when he can bring the audio in and give everything a new twist you suddenly see it freshly again."



> "You want to get along for the most part, but you also want to mess with each other when you get the chance"
> Moo Yu

And while friend of Crawle's and Hollywood composer Daniel Pemberton brings some emotion and craft to the soundtrack, it's Young who has implemented little audio cues that give us an insight into the minds of Demelza and Nessa from moment to moment. "Some of the great moments are things like when you get on the bikes you hear in the distance (or perhaps just in their heads) the sound of horses whinnying, almost as if our little heroines are becoming knights on their steeds when they get on their bikes," Crawle reveals. "And in the races they pretend they're almost like attack planes, they've got their arms out and they're doing all of the aeroplane noises and what have you. Although they're racing and they're deadly serious about it, they're not afraid to just go for it in terms of imagining that they're jet planes at the same time."

So where is Foam Sword with the game now? It's in full-polish mode, although not quite ready to pin down a release date. "I think at big studios you always orchestrate things in a very particular way because you need to get everyone on the same page; there are so many moving parts and you need to stay efficient," Yu tell us. "For us there's just an infinite amount of work at all times and always will be. Right now we're focused on polishing up the first half of the game and just trying to get that to a point where we can actually play through it and it feels like a proper released game. That's the point that we're at now."

"It is definitely all coming together and it's now more about getting the little moments of, not necessarily cutscenes, but the animation and the story elements are all coming across rather than being at a time when we're actually trying to figure out all of the building blocks of the game," adds Crawle. "We can very much play it and feel the atmosphere of the world and the characters and what have you, and now it's all about maximising that and making sure that we're definitely delivering the game that we promised to everyone."




"When you get your first bike that's when as a kid you first have a little bit of independence"
Rex Crawle

How much of what's happening on the island of Penfurzy is real or just in the minds of the two girls is really left open for the time being. What's clear though is that their adventure is going to take them to some classic playground spots for kids growing up like woods, work sites and abandoned theme parks.

Enemies in the game can be taken out by each of the girls, but combining your moves will get the job done faster. The team tells us it doesn't think people will find all the combinations that are possible, there are that many.


DRAGONBALL
LEGENDS



# NEW HORIZONS

RENEWED INTEREST FROM CORE GAMING PUBLISHERS AND DEVELOPERS IN THE MOBILE PLATFORM IS FUELLING A HUGE RESURGENCE OF SUPPORT IN THE MARKET. BANDAI NAMCO IS ONE SUCH COMPANY LEADING THE CHARGE WITH DRAGON BALL LEGENDS, A SIMPLE FIGHTER POWERED BY A MULTIPLAYER SYSTEM THAT IS INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE OF COMPETITIVE MOBILE GAMING

**Bandai Namco wants to establish a new standard for mobile gaming. For many of you, the studio may indeed be synonymous with nurturing core-console experiences in games and franchises such as Ace Combat, *Beautiful Katamari*, Soulcalibur and Tekken, and for publishing such smash hits as Dark Souls and *Dragon Ball FighterZ*. But through 2018 and beyond, Bandai Namco is looking to take command of a new market and it's one, we'd wager, that you are already equipped to invest time in yourself.**

The company isn't leaving console gaming behind, but in the eyes of a Western audience, it is certainly pushing more resources and energy than ever before into the mobile gaming marketplace. It is looking, not only to support the platform as a viable landing pad for games that are more aligned with what we consider to be 'traditional' experiences, but also to evolve the remit of the space as well. Honestly, the results of this creative endeavour might just surprise you.

"The smartphone industry changing really surprised us, especially on the technical side," Keigo Ikeda, the project lead behind *Dragon Ball Legends*, tells us. "We really worked hard so that the majority of people who have smartphones can play our games. In that sense, it is one of our goals to change how people look at smartphones – it isn't just a communication device anymore, it is now a proper gaming device."

Bandai Namco's approach to cracking through the Western mobile market – a market dominated largely by 'casual' game »

experiences – is effectively comprised of a three-pronged creative assault, encompassing accessibility, depth and true technological advancement. Through *Dragon Ball Legends* Bandai Namco is confident that it can set "a new benchmark in global PvP" through a lucrative and impressive partnership with Google. In *Sword Art Online: Integral Factor*, *One Piece Bounty Rush* and *Naruto X Baruto: Ninja Voltage* the company is looking to strike a new balance between the simplicity of mobile gaming's touch inputs and the complexity of what is seen as more 'traditional' console experiences – something that history has proven is far easier said than done.

So, why now? To understand that you need to understand the state of the mobile market and the feeling of excitement quietly permeating through large parts of the games industry; there is change on the horizon, and Bandai Namco wants to be one of the key driving forces behind it.

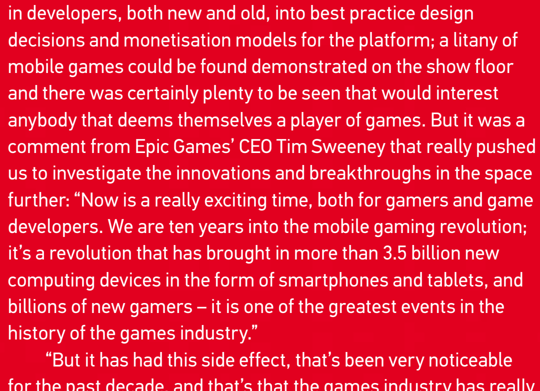
It is estimated that gamers around the globe spent more than $59 billion within the mobile gaming ecosystem in 2017 alone. Line that, frankly ridiculous, number up against the digital revenues accrued from the PC market ($33 billion) or the significantly smaller console market ($8.3 billion) and perhaps you're beginning to understand why more developers than ever before are starting to turn their attention to the devices that live so comfortably in your jacket pocket.

You could feel the electricity in the air around mobile gaming as a viable platform for true gaming experiences at GDC 2018. The Game Developer Conference, held annually in San Francisco, that is so often used as a venue to showcase the latest advancements in toolsets and technology is designed to give members of the industry an opportunity to trade expertise and to give us but a glimpse into what form the next year of gaming will likely take on.

We won't lie, the aforementioned figures had been a curiosity to us since they were reported at the beginning of the year – the wider industry clearly felt the same, if GDC is anything to go by. Entire days were dedicated to summit sessions cluing in developers, both new and old, into best practice design decisions and monetisation models for the platform; a litany of mobile games could be found demonstrated on the show floor and there was certainly plenty to be seen that would interest anybody that deems themselves a player of games. But it was a comment from Epic Games' CEO Tim Sweeney that really pushed us to investigate the innovations and breakthroughs in the space further: "Now is a really exciting time, both for gamers and game developers. We are ten years into the mobile gaming revolution; it's a revolution that has brought in more than 3.5 billion new computing devices in the form of smartphones and tablets, and billions of new gamers – it is one of the greatest events in the history of the games industry."

"But it has had this side effect, that's been very noticeable for the past decade, and that's that the games industry has really been split into two halves. On one side there are the high-end PC and console gamers and then on the other hand there have been casual and mobile games," Sweeney said, noting that there are over 100,000 games that are shipping every year on the platform, all of them competing for the same top ten charts on the iOS and Android storefronts. "But we see this new trend now that is upending the games industry and we think it is going to be great for everybody. And that is that mobile gaming is now shifting from casual gaming as a focus to serious games for serious gamers."

And he's right, that change *is* coming. Unreal is focused on bringing games that have been traditionally seen as 'core' multiplayer experiences to mobile – akin to the likes of *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, *Fortnite* and *Ark: Survival Evolved*. But what Sweeny's comments perhaps overlook is that there's a reason the mobile market brings in so much revenue over traditional gaming platforms – the mobile game audience responds well to casual games because they are easy to pick up and play, easy to learn despite being difficult to master. The



## ONE PIECE BOUNTY RUSH

### "TAKE THE LOOT, YOU PIRATE!"

Coming to the West this summer (and with pre-registration currently live on the Google Play store front) *One Piece Bounty Rush* is a frantic four-versus-four PvP game set in the anime universe of *One Piece*. Featuring a variety of its most popular characters, this action-RPG is simple to play but there does seem to be depth hidden in there. While the NPC AI doesn't seem particularly advanced, and the arena design could do with a little bit of flair to reflect the series it draws so much inspiration from, we did walk away impressed with the premise and combat. There's a lot going on in *One Piece Bounty Rush*, to the point that it can be a little tough to track all of the action at once, but overall it's a pretty good example of how a Dynasty Warriors-style game could perhaps be one day adapted for mobile platforms.



## SWORD ART ONLINE: INTEGRAL FACTOR

### "COULD YOU HAVE CHANGED THE DEATH GAME?"

Of all of the properties Bandai Namco has in its stable, it's perhaps *Sword Art Online* that feels the most capable of transitioning to the videogame format. The premise sees players trapped in a deadly virtual world, where they must navigate 100 levels of increasing complexity to escape – should you die in the game, you die in the real world! *Integral Factor* is a surprisingly deep RPG that shows real promise; it comes incredibly close to offering a console-style experience on mobile, bringing strong character customisation, tight controls and sprawling world design to the platform alongside a sprinkling of interesting online multiplayer components. Launching later this year, you can register for the iOS and Android version right now to secure your place in the death game.



question of whether developers should be wholeheartedly focused on 'hardcore games for hardcore gamers' overlooks the idea that there is a happy medium to be struck between the two opposing halves. It's a sentiment reflected in comments Bandai Namco's Yoshinobu Takabayashi made to us.

"The mobile market is getting tougher and tougher," the veteran brand manager tells us. "More games are being published every day than ever before and the games are only getting better and better. So we have to meet the expectations of the market," he says, noting that there is still an inherent difficulty here that has been associated with the shift in attitudes. Notably, those consumers don't seem to care all that much about what it is that's powering the games found within their pockets or the real technological potential that they can offer. "From a development point of view, there's going to be a huge change coming. But personally, I don't think that customers care all that much about it. The customer doesn't care about the technology, they just care about the entertainment and of how attractive the game is."

So **games™** went off in search of the titles that sought to bridge the gap between the casual and hardcore audiences; games that sought to appeal to a broad demographic, but were still utilising next-generation technology to help introduce casual gamers to a core way of playing, even if that fact isn't overtly obvious.

# NARUTO X BARUTO: NINJA VOLTAGE

**"SHOW ME YOUR NINJA WAY!"**

Bandai Namco released *Naruto X Baruto* back in November of 2017 and it has proven hugely popular. It has accrued over ten million downloads across iOS and Android devices in that time, with the hectic blend of strategy and action (not to mention its F2P status) doing enough to entice players outside of the core Naruto fan base. The developer gave us a peak at the Spring 2018 update and it shows how committed Bandai Namco is to ongoing support of these titles; new characters are on their way, optimisation tweaks are coming to some of the core combat systems and the studio is re-assessing its unlock metrics to further improve player retention.




**"THE SMARTPHONE INDUSTRY CHANGING REALLY SURPRISED US, ESPECIALLY ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE"**

# DRAGON BALL LEGENDS

**"I'LL TAKE YOU DOWN WITH ONE FINGER!"**

Bandai Namco set out to create a 3D, heavily-action oriented *Dragon Ball Z* game for mobile – one that would satisfy fans of the franchise and lovers of competitive PvP multiplayer. Built using state-of-the-art Google Cloud technology to enable global real-time battles with little (to no) lag, *Legends* is an impressive application. Its primary design echoes that of the Xenoverse series of games, albeit a version of it heavily simplified for mobile devices. The locked third-person, over-the-shoulder camera returns, although the controls have been overhauled to let you attack and defend through a series of swipes and taps. The idea is that the entire game can be played with one finger; cards can be put into play, listed along the bottom of the screen, to unleash devastating super attacks and unique combo moves. While simple to play, we also get the sense that there's plenty of depth there behind the surface – be sure to check this one out when it launches later this year for iOS and Android devices.



One of the clearest examples of this we found was in *Dragon Ball Legends*. While its inputs and mechanics are easy enough to grasp – regardless of your knowledge or experience with the anime franchise it draws its content from – the systems underpinning its multiplayer PvP action could have a huge impact on the way in which we think about mobile as a competitive space for gaming.

"We've actually been in development for more than two and a half years with *Dragon Ball Legends*. And honestly, for that entire time, even until recently, everybody around us has been telling us that what we're doing is not plausible, that it's not realistic, [asking] us what we are doing with our time. And right now we would like to tell them, HA!" laughs Ikeda, confident in the work that his team has been doing alongside production staff from Dimps, to align authenticity with the brand, and engineers from Google, to ensure that *Dragon Ball Legends* features world-class multiplayer systems. The game's overseas producer, Toshitaka Tachibana, best sums up the premise: "Every fighter deserves a solid connection."

It isn't that mobile games haven't ever attempted to introduce competitive multiplayer opportunities in the past, it's that they haven't, traditionally, been wholly reliable. In a fighting game, lag can be a killer; it can be the justification for throwing a controller (or in this case, your phone) and for outbursts of uncontained social media moaning. *Dragon Ball Legends* is made in union with Google Cloud Platform (GCP) to ensure a low-lag and smooth online multiplayer service for all, no matter your location around the world. The GCP allows devices to communicate at 150ms and with a stable connection and, to put it simply enough; it's a huge upgrade on mobile-based multiplayer's tendency to segment servers geographically or to push players to battle AI loosely modelled on your play style and behaviour. "We aren't going to muck around by providing pseudo experiences of player-versus-player where players fight other player data, it isn't going to be like that," re-affirms Tachibana. "We'll actually have the players fighting one-on-one, any place and at any time." »








## "EVERYBODY AROUND US HAS BEEN TELLING US THAT WHAT WE'RE DOING IS NOT PLAUSIBLE"

"Our global PvP would not have been possible without GCP," Ikeda tells us. "In fact, it's so technically difficult to achieve that it wasn't even one of our options [in the game] originally. Without GCP, the game would have been an entirely different experience. It would be heavily story oriented, with maybe some player versus player aspects to it, but it would have to have been separated into different regions and areas – that would have been a necessity. Google was really essential for us to achieve global real-time PvP. If they weren't in this scenario, we would not have been able to realise that game mode"

It works too. Given the opportunity to get our hands on *Legends* and engage in a cross-Pacific battle with staff back at the Tokyo HQ (some five thousand miles away), we were surprised to find the connection as stable as it was, even from our location in a grimy nightclub basement that Bandai Namco decided to host its play sessions in. It's fun too, regardless of whether you're engaged in real-time online battles or the offline reflection of it; it's designed to be easy to learn, with attacks dished out with simple taps and swipes to unleash the audacious screen-filling combos that the franchise is known for, though there's hints of depth there for those that want to stick with it and gain a competitive edge.

While *Legends* can indeed be comfortably played with one finger, the tech powering it is a little more complicated. "I think what we're watching here is a world-first," considers Miles Ward, the director of Google Cloud's Solutions architecture. "The technology that's being used, that's powered by Google's infrastructure, is allowing the *Dragon Ball Legends* game to do something that's not happening in any other environment."

The reason that's possible," Ward continues, "is because of about $30.9 billion that Google has spent laying transatlantic and transpacific cables to build our own private network. That network is big… you may have heard of this other network, it's called the internet; well, this network is five times its size," he notes of the service that encompasses 70 points of presence across 33 countries. "And because we have the infrastructure to manage it end to end, it allows every player of a game to interact in real-time… it really is a world-first."

It's at this point that Ward, as delightfully charismatic as he is, gets "super nerdy" about the way in which Google is able to handle and categorise all of this player data in real-time. He starts talking about Atomic Clocks at each of the Google data centres and GPS devices that manage tectonic plate drift… look, it isn't important. What *is* important is what innovation *Legends* is driving into the industry here.

Bringing competitive real-time multiplayer to mobile – without placing restriction on region, location or connection strength – could have wide ranging implications to the market. For core players, it means that the quality and stability will soon be at a point where more 'traditional' experiences can quite easily function on smartphones – the power offered by the iPhone X and Pixel 2, for example, is ridiculous. For casual gamers they won't likely notice any immediate change, but they will begin to see a change in the types of experiences they are finding on their smartphones, which could in turn help convert some of the billions of mobile players out there in the world into console or PC gamers.

This, of course, is just the beginning. Google is committed to expanding the scope of GCP in the coming months, and it is open to working with any partner so long as the concept is forward thinking and pushing up against pre-existing boundaries. It all starts with *Legends* when it launches this summer for iOS and Android devices.

Bandai Namco may be wrapping its initiative in familiar anime branding, but at the heart of each experience is a desire to take fundamental game concepts and genres that the core console and PC fan bases will be familiar with, simplifying them just enough to bring in a casual player or fan of the source material. It's a difficult line to walk, but it's one that the company is eager to pursue as it looks towards the future of the mobile market and its business.

"There are some of our fans that don't like 'hardcore' games and some 'hardcore' game fans don't like simple games," laughs Takabayashi. "But by making our games simple to start with but deep inside, we believe we can find a way that we can satisfy hardcore gamers too, so we can attract hardcore fans at the same time as casual fans. We want to create games that are simple to play, so that every one of our fans will be able to play and enjoy any of our games."



# Reviews



66

## SEA OF THIEVES

We committed ourselves to the waves and set sail for adventure, but is Rare's online epic a treasure for the modern age of gaming?

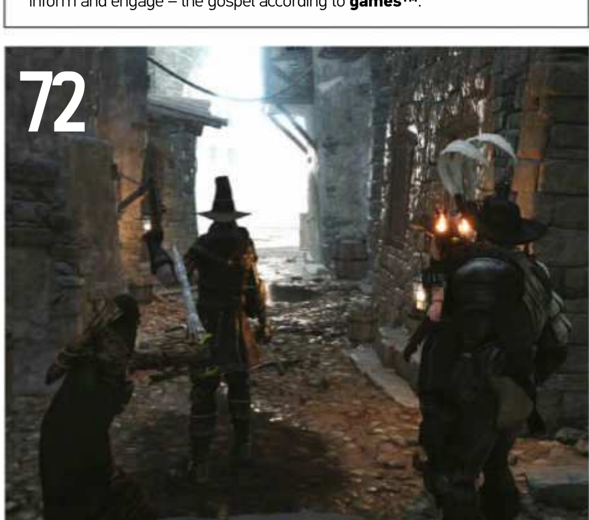




## THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven and, of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest. We'd never let that happen, and besides, you'd smell it a mile off. Finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact. They are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists designed to enlighten, inform and engage – the gospel according to **games™**.
















## AGREE/DISAGREE?

**games™ is always right. But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or did we nail it?**

**Let us know through the following channels:**


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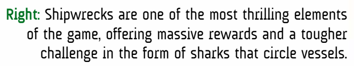

@gamesTMmag
#gamestmiswrong #gamestmisright

**YOU HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED THE BEST OF THIS GAME UNLESS YOU'RE IN A PANIC**

## I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST ARRRGH

As with any team-based multiplayer experience we would highly recommend you play with a headset of some kind so you can talk with your crewmates. However, Rare has attempted to give players without a mic some options to communicate with the squad by hitting up and down on the D-pad. Down accesses a bunch of emotes (dancing, clapping, sitting) while up offers different text chat options, with even more available by hitting X and more still if you're holding an object for contextual options. For instance if you hold a plank for repairing the ship you'll have messages about doing the repairs or repairs being needed. These text chat options can also be seen by players you meet on the Ferry Of The Damned if you want to make friends in limbo.





Right: Shipwrecks are one of the most thrilling elements of the game, offering massive rewards and a tougher challenge in the form of sharks that circle vessels.



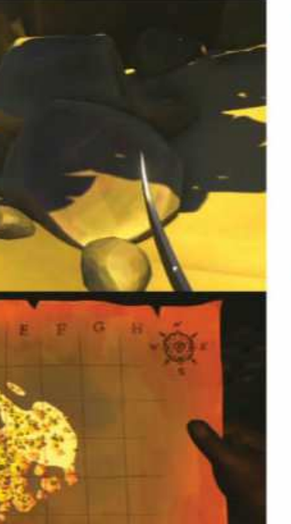
INTO THE WIND

# Sea of Thieves

**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** Xbox One
**OTHER FORMAT:** PC
**ORIGIN:** UK
**PUBLISHER:** Microsoft
**DEVELOPER:** Rare
**PRICE:** £49.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** Massively Multiplayer
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** Yes

Left: What Rare has achieved with its sea physics deserves all of the praise and celebration we can muster. It's a truly glorious element to experience. It also makes us wish that more of the game was under water. Hopefully it's something that can be added down the line.





BETTER THAN DEFIANCE

WORSE THAN THE DIVISION




Left: The core mechanics of navigating by map and compass are simple enough in principle, but not without their challenges. But we have to say it's refreshing to play a game without a HUD map or waypoint markers directing you all the way.

**Rare is so close to something here.** So close in fact that sometimes you can get a taste of how good *Sea Of Thieves* can be and that tease of flavour is enough to power you through another few hours, toiling away on your ship, chipping away at fetch quests over and over in the hopes that you'll pick up the scent again. But we're really not sure it's there. We felt lured in over and over, wondering if the very fact we couldn't walk away was a sign of how engaging this experience is, only to conclude that our interest was waning the more time that passed.

If you're a longer-term reader of this magazine or even just saw our *Sea Of Thieves* feature from a few months back then you know there's a small place in our hearts reserved for Rare. This storied developer has been doing incredible work for over 30 years. We even admire the more recent Kinect titles, as unpopular as they were among many fans of the studio. We have been excited by what *Sea Of Thieves* offers ever since our first hands-on experience with it, waiting to see what more it could deliver and when it's on song it really is something. It's just horribly inconsistent and short-lived when it happens.

The moment-to-moment loop of gameplay is so tactile and smart. Controlling your ship, whether it's a solo sloop or galleon, is an art that can be learnt, but never truly mastered. Angling your sails with the wind, raising them to slow down as you approach a land mass or tricky obstacle, holding the wheel during a choppy storm to maintain your course and timing your anchor drop for a tidy exit all need to be learned (with no tutorial help to speak of), but you will likely still make mistakes. And as a crew you will *definitely* make mistakes and that's kind of part of the fun. *Sea Of Thieves* is relying on you messing up, making a mistake and forgetting something. That's where the best moments of the experience emerge.

A smooth sailing experience is satisfying in its own way, but you haven't experienced the best of this game unless you're in a panic and that panic can come at you from any number of directions. It might be the mild panic of the ship taking on water and needing to be both repaired and bailed out, which playing alone can be quite challenging and on a multi-deck galleon offers its own issues as you get in each other's way. It might come from another crew charging at you out in the open ocean or sneaking around an island and launching an attack while half your team is out looking for pigs to catch. It might come from sharks circling you as you delve into a shipwreck. There are lots of possibilities and sometimes they combine in interesting ways.

When the panic sets in, that's when you realise how important a good crew can be, because when you're in the midst of a pitch battle or, heaven forbid, the kraken should show up, you need a group of people around you who are going to keep their heads and work in tandem. So many functions of the ship are best served with people working together. Even something as simple as firing a cannon is infinitely better served by having multiple pirates on the case as someone aims, another loads and then runs and grabs more ammo for the next volley.



## FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

**MANUAL CONTROL:** So much of the game is player controlled. Ships need to be managed, resources gathered by hand and navigation worked out. It makes for a uniquely tactile experience.

In fact the demarcation of roles is so easy to understand that everyone we've shared *Sea Of Thieves* with seems to fall into the experience pretty quickly. No one necessarily needs to be a specialist, but some roles are taken to faster than others. The good communicators take to navigation; anyone with solid FPS credentials takes point on storming the fortress. Everyone can make a contribution, which speaks to the successful implementation of one of Rare's core intentions with this game, that it should be as simple to approach and inviting to players as possible once the initial learning curve has been successfully navigated.

Rare has done a fine job of balancing joy and dread in *Sea Of Thieves*. It skirts the line between being cartoonish and terrifying, relaxing and stressful at all times. It's a nice little trick to have pulled off, achieved largely through the game's art direction and animation.

The colour palette is bright and enticing with its gorgeously rendered sea and tropical islands. But then the jagged rocks jut out from the ocean with a far more foreboding feel and the skeletons attack in packs, reminding you of how tenacious and challenging they can be. There's a lightness of touch, warmth of spirit that feels so firmly in line with Rare's heritage. For all of the peril on these open seas, from AI and other players alike, the game world remains an inviting one, full of promise.

It's a promise that begins to thin out and fade over time, however. Having the right crew whose company you enjoy will power you through *Sea Of Thieves* without too many problems. The journey alone, rather than any need to reach a destination of an endgame, will be enough to keep you all coming back and challenging yourselves. But without that you'll begin to see the repeating formula and the lack of crafted depth to *Sea Of Thieves*. We're confident this is entirely intentional on Rare's part; wanting to make *Sea Of Thieves* as player-driven and open as possible. However, the lack of clearly defined structure or hooks that might drag you into the lore (perhaps with the promise of some incredible hidden treasure) means that there are going to be times you find yourself floating around, directionless, wondering why exactly you're still forging forward.

And we don't know that we have an answer. We've been trying to find one again and again and as much as we admire the direction Rare has taken with *Sea Of Thieves*, we can't help but wonder if it would have been better served by more traditional upgrade systems or some sense of personal levelling and improvement. The flat system that you earn reputation with the three trading companies is very egalitarian, meaning that any player who joins the world, whether you turned up for launch week or don't venture out into the world for another couple of months, has all of the same abilities and tools as veteran players. The only sign of your experience over and above everyone else is the clothing you wear and the way your ship is adorned. And that's fine. We love a bit of customisation and telling the story of the world through the way players present themselves, but what is it really worth? Is it worth 70,000 gold and all of the hours and hours of fetch quests it will take to earn all of that? That's an equation we all have to calculate for ourselves, but for our time with the game it certainly started to drag us down.

And we really tried to mix it up in the hopes of finding some new angle on the experience, trying to meet it halfway and fully embrace the chaos. We've seen some amazing stories of crews meeting up, creating little challenges for each other and races, joining random galleon teams and charging over the horizon to some incredible adventures and battles. But we've also experienced meeting random players in the world and just being shot on sight with no real thinking or reasoning behind it. We've joined a random crew and been immediately voted into the brig for no greater transgression than not being invited.

Which brings us back to this issue of structure, which Rare has shunned in the true spirit of pirate lawlessness and freedom. It's a worthy commitment, but one that means that players are going to meet frustrations over and over again, and so much of what is potentially great about the game is left up to luck. We've seen the more staunch-

## FAQs

**Q. SO, ENOUGH TO DO?**
Yes and no. There's no shortage of missions, but they can get very samey. More variety of styles would be welcome.

**Q. DO YOU NEED TO PLAY WITH FRIENDS?**
We would recommend it, but you don't have to. Playing with a random crew or on your own though is just not as fun.

**Q. IS IT GOOD VALUE?**
If you're thinking about a full purchase we would wait to see what updates come, but with a Game Pass, it might be worth the subscription for a couple of months.



**Right:** *Sea Of Thieves* really is a gorgeous game, all-round, with some great lighting effects through the day-and-night cycle as well as some wonderful vistas. There's sometimes some reward to exploring the larger islands beyond the specific treasure locations, too.

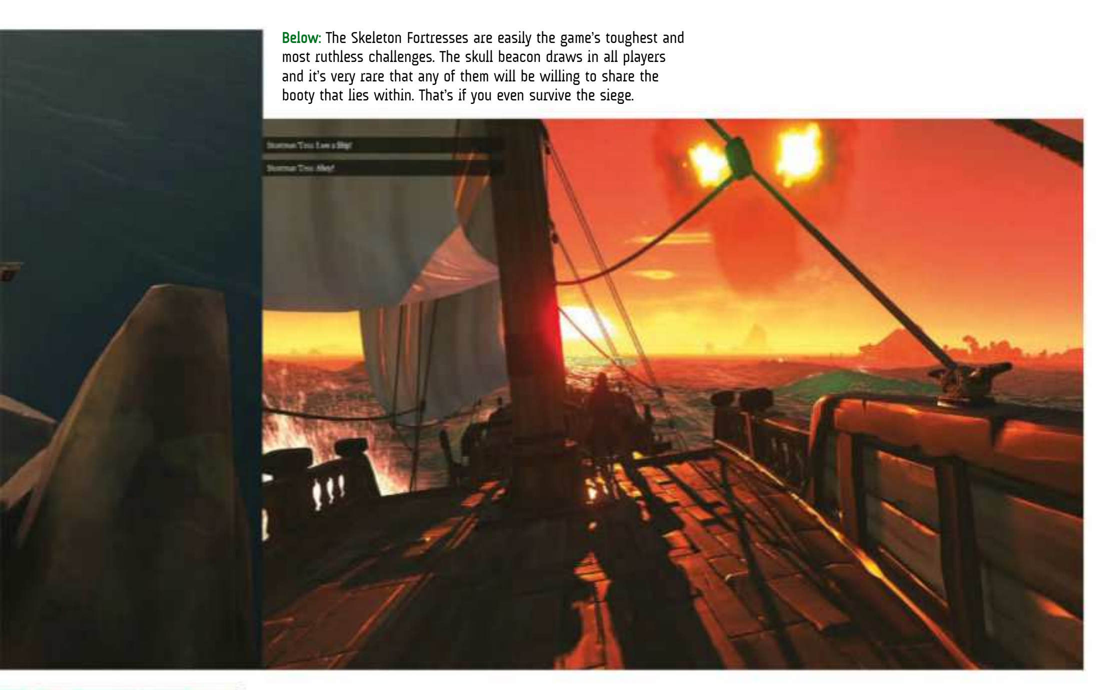




**Above:** We're not sure there's a dread that runs any deeper in a *Sea Of Thieves* player than the one you feel as you attempt to reach an outpost with a ship full of treasure after a successful series of trips. Anything could happen.

**THERE ARE GOING TO BE TIMES YOU FIND YOURSELF FLOATING AROUND, DIRECTIONLESS**

**Below:** The Skeleton Fortresses are easily the game's toughest and most ruthless challenges. The skull beacon draws in all players and it's very rare that any of them will be willing to share the booty that lies within. That's if you even survive the siege.





## TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

### THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

**30 MINS**

Getting to grips with the ship controls and learning the ropes, as they say. The sea holds no immediate fear for you and you can enjoy the voyage.

**5 HOURS**

Hopefully you have a crew together to play with regularly and whose company you enjoy, otherwise the game may have started dragging already.

**30 DAYS**

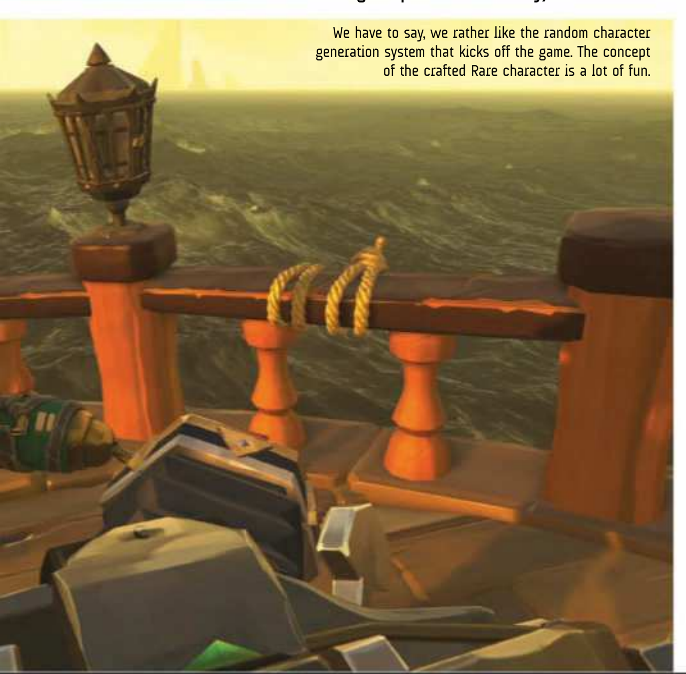
By now you'll have likely levelled up your reputation with all of the companies and seen most of what the game has to offer, but what comes next?



## CARTOGRAPHY FOR BEGINNERS

**The longer you spend on the sea of thieves you'll likely pick up some solid knowledge of which islands you need to think about when on the hunt for specific animals or chances of some lucky random drops of resources and treasure. Smuggler's Bay, for instance, became a regular stop for us if we were passing by as it was usually good for a couple of random treasure chests lying around, a few barrels of gunpowder and all of the chickens we could ever need. Learning the locations to avoid is a little tougher, but certainly some regions of the map are a little more treacherous than others and even some outposts are a little trickier to disembark on (anything with a long walk from dock to trading companies can be risky).**

We have to say, we rather like the random character generation system that kicks off the game. The concept of the crafted Rare character is a lot of fun.



and-developed *Sea Of Thieves* community rally in this regard, attempting to establish rules of conduct for players such as making a commitment to not attack newbie ships (easy enough to spot as they tend to be plain and undecorated) or at least to attempt friendly encounters first before throwing themselves into full-scale battle.

But then we also can't deny that the mischievous side of *Sea Of Thieves* can be fun too when sneaking onto ships and stealing them from unsuspecting crews, or dropping gunpowder on their lower decks and blowing it up so they have no idea what hit them. If you have a devilish side to you then *Sea Of Thieves* is yours to plunder and maybe that will be enough to power you through, griefing other players as you are free to do and making some coin along the way, but we have to imagine that even that will get old pretty quickly.

So, we have to wonder what comes next? Playing *Sea Of Thieves* brings to mind two pertinent points of comparison that offer different directions for where the game can go. The first is perhaps the more obvious one and that's *Tom Clancy's The Division*, a similarly shared open world that offered a lot more structure and traditional RPG levelling at launch, but has done a fine job of extending the life-cycle of the game even if players drifted away from it at a fair pace. The demarcation of co-op missions, solo exploration and PvP areas meant that you always knew what you were getting yourself into. The other game that came to mind was *No Man's Sky*, which was entirely solo and in some ways similarly structureless with only a mild, easily defeated threat, earning money to spend on upgrades to go deeper into the experience for a reward that is unknown and of no immediate value. We didn't mind that with *No Man's Sky* because it was an undisrupted experience, although that may be a minority view. But Hello Games has moved on, grown its structures, added new features and made the experience fuller and more varied over time. Much like how these examples started out, *Sea Of Thieves* still feels like it's in its earliest incarnation, waiting to be fleshed out.

We have nothing but respect for Rare's vision with *Sea Of Thieves*, but it is a game as likely to chew you up and spit you out, as it is to embrace you. If the wind is in your favour then it can be a delight, but a storm is never far off if you lose momentum. The real test of the quality and efficacy of Rare's plan will be in how it manages to evolve and grow in the weeks and months to come. If it can continue to deliver as a shared experience with world events and new challenges then it might just stay seaworthy for a little while longer.

## MISSING LINK

### WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

**COMMUNITY PREFERENCES:** The wild open sea is perhaps a little too wild. Everyone is coming to this game wanting a different style of play and some form of matchmaking would at least cut down on griefing.

**VERDICT 7/10**

**SMARTLY MADE, BUT LACKING IN FEATURES**

ONE MAN AND A BABY

# Yakuza 6: The Song Of Life

**The seventh main entry in the Yakuza series brings to a close the tale of Kazuma Kiryu, a character the franchise and its players have been invested in for over a decade.** For the legendary fourth chairman's swansong, Sega has scaled back many of the series' expanded features, such as multiple protagonists and sprawling environments, in favour of an adventure that's more concentrated, and consequently packs a far greater emotional punch. This downsized approach effectively serves two purposes: for long-time fans, it provides a focused and fitting send-off for its popular protagonist, and for newcomers, it's a manageable sampling that acts as a suitable introduction to the long-running series.

And Sega seems more than keen to use *The Song of Life* to swell the ranks of Yakuza fans; the game bends over backwards to ensure that the initiated aren't at a loss when it comes to its extensive cast and complex past events. From the menu, players can select 'Memories' for a detailed overview of the events of all past Yakuza titles, swiftly getting up to speed on the main players and political intricacies. There's also a lengthy intro which, apart from a brawl outside a bar with a drunken miscreant, doesn't require any input from your digits whatsoever in the opening hour, but considering the events at the end of the last game play directly into the opening of this one, it's somewhat necessary, if a tad long-winded.

Like all games in the series, there's a huge emphasis on story, and lengthy cutscenes are numerous throughout. Adamant to live out his later years as a civilian, Kiryu spends time behind bars to atone for his criminal past, but upon being released finds that his adoptive daughter Haruka is missing. Taking Haruka's son into his care, his search for her takes him to the streets of Kamurocho and the country

## DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PS4
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Sega
**DEVELOPER:** In-house
**PRICE:** £49.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** Yes

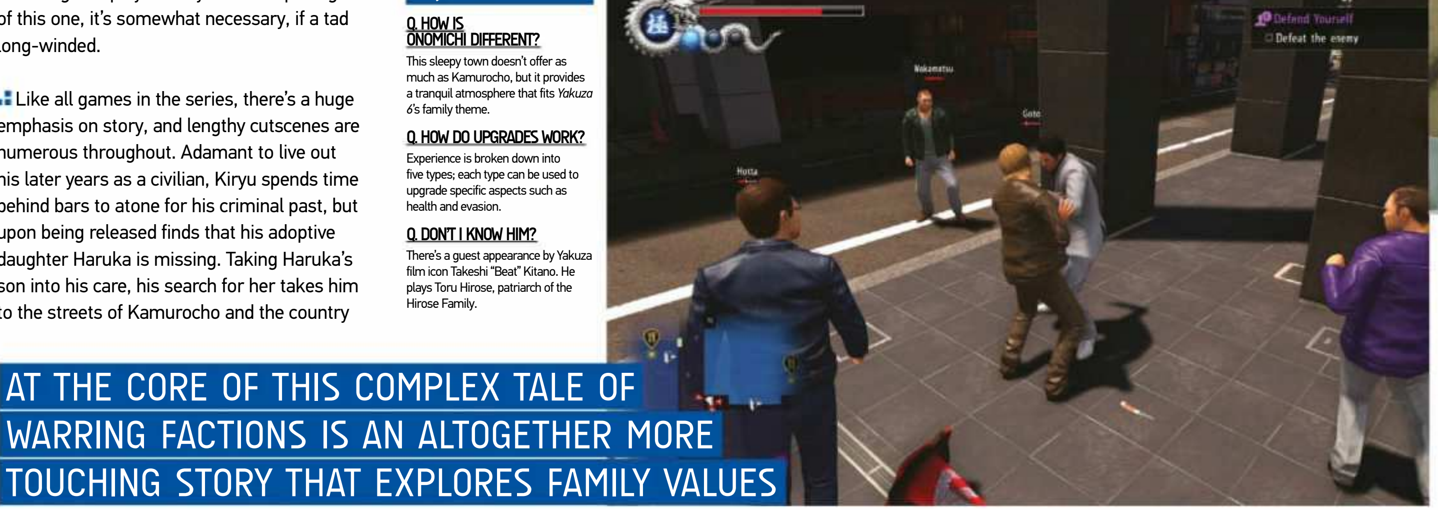



## FAQs

**Q. HOW IS ONOMICHI DIFFERENT?**
This sleepy town doesn't offer as much as Kamurocho, but it provides a tranquil atmosphere that fits *Yakuza 6*'s family theme.

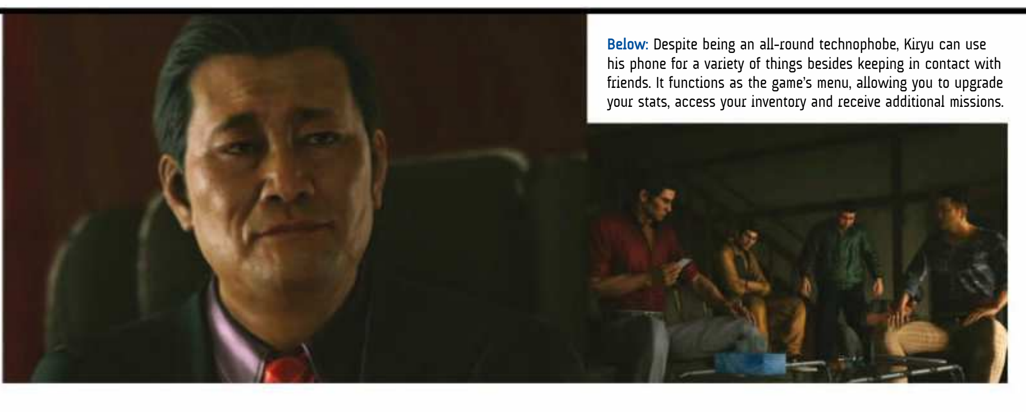
**Q. HOW DO UPGRADES WORK?**
Experience is broken down into five types; each type can be used to upgrade specific aspects such as health and evasion.

**Q. DON'T I KNOW HIM?**
There's a guest appearance by Yakuza film icon Takeshi "Beat" Kitano. He plays Toru Hirose, patriarch of the Hirose Family.




AT THE CORE OF THIS COMPLEX TALE OF WARRING FACTIONS IS AN ALTOGETHER MORE TOUCHING STORY THAT EXPLORES FAMILY VALUES



**Below:** Despite being an all-round technophobe, Kiryu can use his phone for a variety of things besides keeping in contact with friends. It functions as the game's menu, allowing you to upgrade your stats, access your inventory and receive additional missions.

**Left:** *Yakuza 6* debuted in Japan two years ago, but it more than holds up visually today. Built from the ground up for PS4, players are able to see every glistening pore and pick up on every subtle facial expression, thanks to the new Dragon engine.

BETTER THAN — MAFIA 3

WORSE THAN — GRAND THEFT AUTO V

town of Onomichi, Hiroshima. This tense and twisting narrative rife with deception and intrigue sees Kiryu establish fragile alliances and fend off dangerous rival organisations. Familiar faces like Date and Akiyama return, while some fascinating newcomers are also introduced. At the core of this complex tale of violence and warring factions, however, is an altogether more touching story that proficiently explores family values, the bonds of friendship and the complexities of fatherhood in this crime-ridden world.

When not engaging in lengthy dialogue, the main quests usually involve beating fifty shades of red out of opponents using a mix of fists and fast footwork. Combat has considerable depth, with a variety of combos and context-sensitive attacks. You're frequently outnumbered by large groups of opponents and so crowd control is necessary if you're going to come out on top. Grabbing an enemy and hurtling them around and into your opponents is extremely enjoyable, and everyday objects like street cones and bikes can be grabbed and used against enemies for a significant damage boost. Inflicting enough hurt allows you to enter Heat Mode, which culminates in a visually spectacular fist-flying finale. As wonderfully choreographed and executed as the combat moves are, the sheer number of opponents can make battles feel quite clumsy. You can only lock on to one enemy at a time, and the dodge mechanic leaves a lot to be desired. A smaller number of more powerful enemies would have been welcome, and lent itself to better battle tactics and more satisfying showdowns. Victory in battle is rewarded with experience points, and there's commendable freedom to the game's upgrade system to allow you build Kiryu whatever way you like, whether that's putting emphasis on basic attributes like attack power and defence, or learning new skills to give you more choice in combat.




IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

**CLUB SEGA:** Once again, you can ignore your objective and play Sega classics instead. This installement sees the seminal Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown added to the list of playable titles.

While it may not be quite as substantial as *Yakuza Zero* or *5* in terms of length, there's still a plethora of side missions and extra-curricular activities to engage in. Outside of the seriousness of the narrative the series also retains its distinctive flair for the peculiar. There's a body-swapping duo, a time traveller and an overly intrusive phone app, to name but a few of the colourful characters that Kiryu encounters on his journey. Mini-games also make a comeback; Kiryu can kick back with a game of darts or baseball, or test his superstar quality with some karaoke. There's a lot of varied content on offer and these prove an entertaining and carefree distraction to the main event. Some can even be beneficial in gaining extra EXP on the side, such as hitting the gym for a quick-time-event-based workout. Eating also rewards you with experience, making very little in the game actually feel like busywork.

There are also some less-than-savoury activities that Kiryu can indulge in, such as Cabaret clubs. Although an authentic representation of adult entertainment, the sleazy dialogue options available in these chat-up sections feel at odds with Kiryu's character, who's otherwise portrayed as a wholly honourable individual. There's also a severe lack of any other notable female representation, with women's only other role outside of an object of desire being that of a babysitter. It's hardly game ruining, but does make it feel rather outdated when it comes to the fair representation that other developers are pushing for.

*The Song Of Life* may be smaller in scale, but it's in no way lacking in what makes the series great. Its fluid action and bustling open world full of character will draw you in, while the deeply engrossing narrative will keep you hooked until the emotionally fuelled finale.

VERDICT 7/10

A FOND AND FITTING FAREWELL TO KAZUMA KIRYU



## CLAN WARS

*Yakuza 6*'s most substantial side activity comes in the form of Clan Creator. Wading into a war between gangs, Kiryu takes control of one of these groups in an attempt to lead them to victory through simple real-time-strategy-based street brawls. You view the action from above, commanding your basic troops, as well as relaying orders to its leaders – who can utilise special abilities. Online functionality lets you compete against other players and complete daily challenges. While it's an interesting new addition, this feature becomes less engaging over time as, unfortunately, keeping your troops in tip-top condition requires a lot of grinding, and there's not enough diversity in its mechanics to warrant spending a lengthy period of time on.

FROM END TIMES TO A GOOD TIME

# Warhammer: Vermintide II

**Much like the original, *Vermintide II* takes the core of *Left 4 Dead* and transplants it into the Warhammer universe, having you deal with Skaven and Rotbloods instead of hordes of the undead, all of which are 'controlled' by a mischievous A.I. director, sending huge waves of low-level mobs or huge boss monsters at you whenever it feels like doing so, keeping you on your toes and runs through the stages feeling fresh.**

You take up the role of one of a possible five playable characters in a team of four who have to hack, slash and shoot their way through a level before completing a final objective. The characters are all unique classes – Bright Wizard, Waywatcher, Witch Hunter, Dwarf Ranger and Empire Soldier – each offering their own way of dishing out death and supporting their teammates.

There are 13 stages, all of which are absolutely gorgeous to look at. *Vermintide II* is a very attractive looking game – and an atmospheric one to boot – with torchlit tunnels, gloomy forests and citadel streets providing backdrops for all the slaughter. Fatshark has done a real service to the Warhammer universe, capturing not only the bleak, bloody carnage, but some really spectacular vistas.

There's a great risk-reward system too. Hidden within the stages are three tomes and a Skaven grimoire. Picking up a tome takes up your curing item slot, while the grimoire permanently knocks a third off the entire team's health bars, but carrying these to the end of a stage increases the quality of reward you get for a successful run. Real teamwork, with a well-drilled, communicating squad and smart resource management is needed to pull this off.

It's a game that gets better and better the more time you put into it, but that does mean it has a bit of a slow start. During the first hour or so you may feel woefully underlevelled, and flying by the seat of your pants in regards to the objectives needed to complete a level, although thrilling, only makes you feel even more helpless when it all goes south. However, once you've got a few successful runs under your belt and unlocked a few weapons and items, it's easy to succumb to *Vermintide II*'s charms. Jumping into a map with pals, clearing objectives and battling the hordes to unlock bigger and better gear? It's tried and tested, sure, but it's done really, really well here.

Sometimes a sequel sets out to reinvent the wheel, with successful ones completely changing a series for the better, while some lose track of what made the original game so good. Others still are content with simply improving on what came before it, playing things somewhat safer. *Warhammer: Vermintide II* falls squarely in the latter camp, and that is no bad thing at all.

### DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PC
**ORIGIN:** Sweden
**PUBLISHER:** Fatshark
**DEVELOPER:** In-house
**PRICE:** £22.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1-4 Online
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** Yes



## ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

**DAILY GRIND:** The original game's loot was a bit of a grind, but now, with drops tied to your level, it makes you want to give the game one more go, rather than just reaching for your pocket.

BETTER THAN

WARHAMMER: END TIMES – VERMINTIDE



WORSE THAN

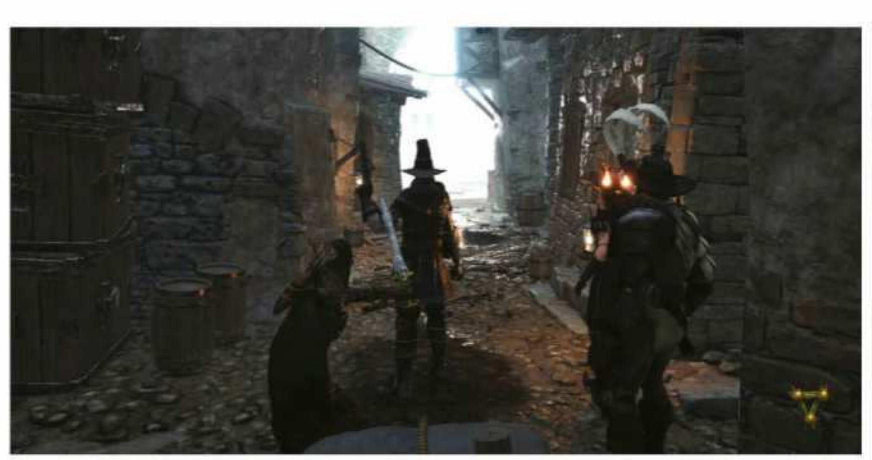


LEFT 4 DEAD

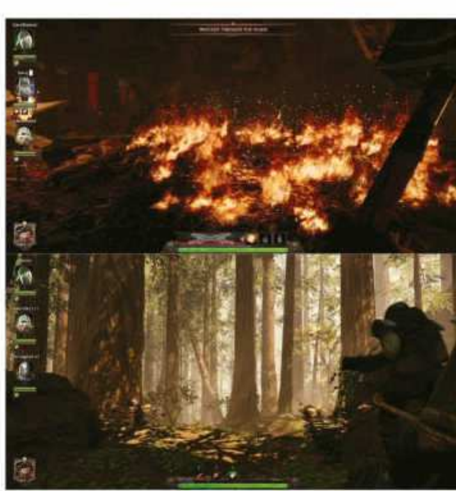


VERDICT 8/10

FATSHARK IS MORE THAN FILLING THE L4D VOID.



**Above:** Sometimes things can get a bit heated in battle – quite literally. There are plenty of consumable bombs and barrels to blast a load of enemies into fiery pieces.



'CAUSE YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

# Far Cry 5

**There's nothing *wrong* with *Far Cry 5*.** It delivers everything fans have come to love – fightin', explorin' and wrestlin' the sharp-toothed fiends skulking in the wilderness. But there's little that's special about it, either. It's like a cake that looks delicious but tastes stale, as though the ingredients have been sitting in a cupboard too long. There's nothing wrong with it, of course – it won't make you *ill* or anything. You've just had it loads of times before, and without any new ingredients in the mix, it's just… well, it's a bit bland, that's all.

And that's what *Far Cry 5* is, really: bland. The story's fine – clichéd, but fine (albeit one that doesn't quite deliver the punch we'd perhaps hoped for). The gameplay too is perfectly acceptable, the easy rinse-and-repeat of outposts and fetch missions making the completionist in us willingly seek out collectibles – lighters, vinyl records, comic books and more – secreted in the peaks and troughs of Hope County. But what you'll come to love most about *Far Cry 5* isn't anything to do with its story or antagonists. Instead, it excels at painting a rich, vibrant world that begs your exploration, and it's this universe built around *Far Cry 5*'s story that shines brightest.

You play as the anonymous Dep(uty) or Rook(ie) tasked with taking down Joseph Seed, a charismatic cult leader decimating the modest community of Hope County, Montana. Yes, it's a fictionalisation, but yes, the story draws on real life, too: at least it seems to be, given one resident asked if that "Russian orange guy" was still President.

It feels unbalanced, though. The story's intent is admirable, but it fails on execution, with any meaningful social commentary on gun rights, drug culture, radicalisation or religious extremists watered down to a lukewarm tale of hallucinogenic drugs. There's little emotional connection with your protagonist or pals, either; your character – a mute, emotionless slab of meat with all the allure of a soiled napkin – is barely any more memorable than the army of identikit soldiers running riot across the county. The only characters painted with any care are Seed's family, with Faith particularly a sad, tragic figure with a devastating backstory.

And yet, story aside, there's something curiously appealing about Hope County. The tasks it sets are familiar, yes, but there is just enough variation to keep us plodding on.

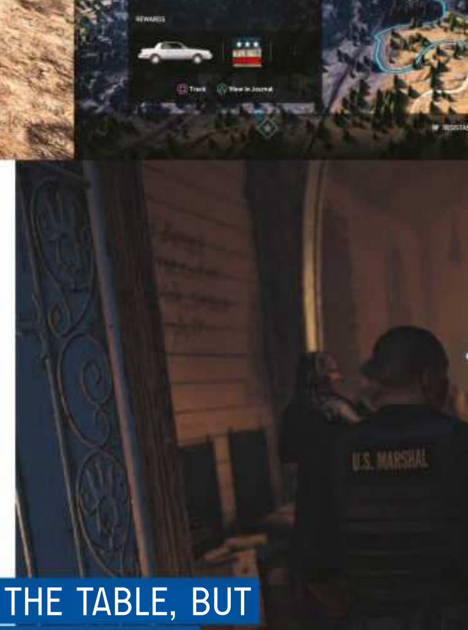
**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** PS4
**OTHER FORMATS:** PC, Xbox One
**ORIGIN:** Canada
**PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft
**DEVELOPER:** In-house
**PRICE:** £54.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1-2
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** No



**Above:** We're not sure what happened here, but no good could've come from this scenario.

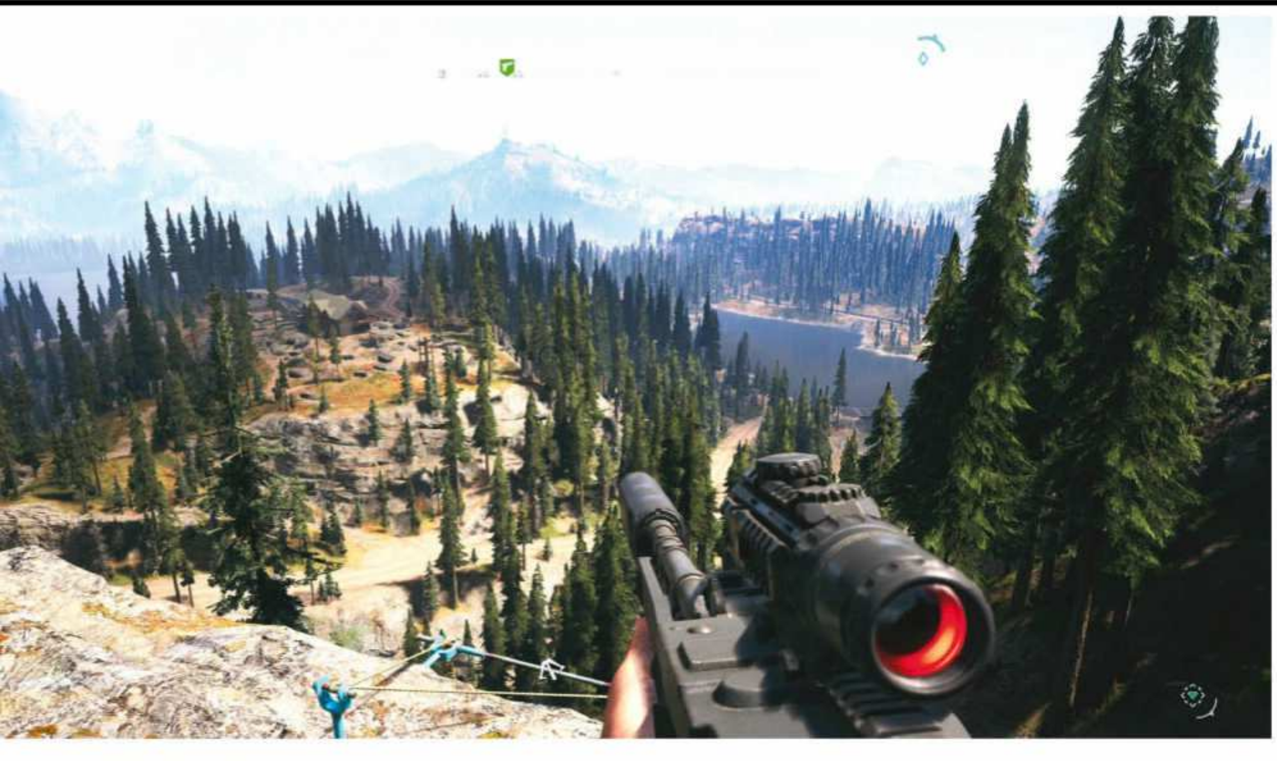





**Above:** It's a pig with a birthday hat on. Because this pig's a fancy pig with places to go. **Above:** Watch your step here. There's certainly an… interesting array of missions in *Far Cry 5*. This one has you searching through dog muck to locate a key fed to a dog. Look, don't blame us, we didn't come up with it.

*Far Cry 5*'s mechanics get in its own way, though. Each final encounter with one of Seed's lieutenants sees you escaping a bunker. While the ensuing scrapes are enjoyable enough, the final hurdle of John's bunker sees you trapped in a circular room scrambling to open a hatch, grapple a helicopter and be lifted to safety. Trouble is, the room is tiny, it's ablaze and there are plenty of Seed's disciples clamouring to take you out. With the button prompt to release the hatch the same as the one to scavenge weapons, in the frantic mash to secure your exit you'll keep picking up one of the dozens of

IT DOESN'T BRING ANYTHING NEW TO THE TABLE, BUT HOPE COUNTY IS ARGUABLY THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WORLD WE'VE EVER SEEN GRACE A CONSOLE



BETTER THAN

FAR CRY PRIMAL





WORSE THAN

ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS

## FAQs

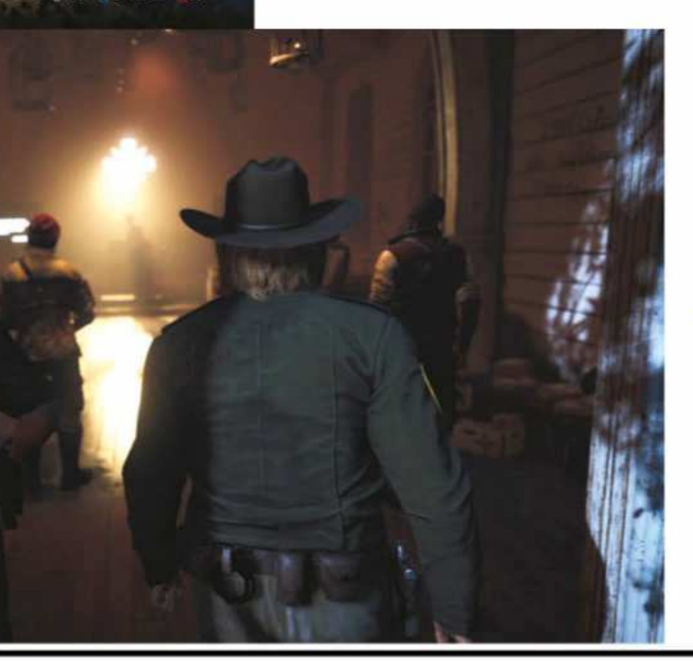
**Q. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE?**
Not needed! Each Far Cry game is self-contained in its own universe, disparate from the others.

**Q. GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY?**
You'll get a good 25-30 hours from the main campaign, and 60+ if you mop up all the side missions, too.

**Q. GUN FOR HIRE FAVES?**
We recommend tamed cougar Peaches for CQC (her stealth and brute strength are deadly), plus Nick Rye to bomb from above.

## ARCADE FIRE

Scattered throughout the county you'll find dozens of Far Cry arcade machines (or playable posters, for reasons we can't fathom either), a game within a game that gives you the chance to create your own virtual playgrounds using not just the assets from Far Cry, but familiar set pieces from other Ubisoft stalwarts like Assassin's Creed and Watch Dogs, too. It's a vast and enticing map editor, with your efforts rewarded by in-game currency and additional perk points, giving added incentives to dive in and share your wares with the community. Best of all, you can traverse the fan-made vistas with a pal in tow, too. We can't wait to see how creative the community gets with it.



discarded guns instead of releasing the latch. Nitpicky? Eh, maybe, but it turns a frenzied escape into a frustrating fumble.

Naturally, your loadout will be unique to your own particular style – stealthy shots from afar, or all guns blazin', it's your choice – but your arsenal is a dull affair, too, and we found the guns we happened upon early on were good for the entire duration, regardless of what other variations we unlocked along the way. Life gets easier still once you've released the bonus inventory slots, after which point you can carry a melee weapon, mid-range gun, a sniper and something devastating, like a rocket launcher. Equip powerful scopes and suppressors and you'll be unstoppable (unless there's a Wolverine around. The equivalent of *FC3*'s honey badgers, they're absolute arseholes to kill).

## FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

**GUNS FOR HIRE:** You'll eventually unlock nine key accomplices, plus a bevy of anonymous soldiers, too, all of whom will gladly help out. Some are stronger than others, but all are helpful in combat.

There's little fun to be had with the perk system or homeopathic remedies, either. Beyond the inventory slots, grabbing a grapple, the wingsuit and maybe boosting your speed just before you leap into a fight, there's not much else to play with. To be honest, the steps you take to *get* the perks – usually associated with Prepper Stashes, one of our favourite *FC5* activities – are more fun than anything the perks themselves unlock. Again, it feels like we're whinging for the sake of it, but there's so little here that makes it stand out against an otherwise grey sea of anonymous FPSs.

Maybe we were spoiled by *Assassin's Creed: Origins*, but *Far Cry 5* lacks both the heart and the polish of Ubisoft's other golden child. You have agency, but there are no lasting repercussions. Help or hinder, it's all the same; the only deterrent is a brief "DO NOT KILL INNOCENT CIVILIANS" warning across the screen, but that's usually only triggered by some mindless oaf stumbling in front of our rocket launcher.

If you've played a Far Cry game before, you've played *Far Cry 5* before, which means if you liked *3* or *4*, you're probably going to enjoy *5*, too. It doesn't bring anything new to the table, with the same liberating of outposts, fetch quests and taking out the cookie-cutter army we've seen before.

Yet it's a stunning place to explore, and arguably the richest, most vibrant world we've ever seen grace a console, and it's this stunning sandbox playground that truly redeems an otherwise quite mediocre offering.

Plus we stayed up way too late on two consecutive school nights just to meander through the mountains mopping up missing comics and lighters, so it must be doing something right, eh?

**VERDICT 7/10**
WORTHY OF YOUR TIME, DESPITE BEING PREDICTABLE



**Above:** There are moments like this throughout the game where you can ignore the objective for a moment and engage in a minigame.

## MAKING FRIENDS

**The game's neatest and most essential feature is Friend Pass, a system that allows anyone on your Friends list to download the *A Way Out* Free Trial and play the whole game with your for free over Xbox Live or PSN. You'll need to invite them to the game in order for them to access the full title's content, but once they're in they'll get an identical experience to the owner of the game. The downside? Only the game's owner will get any achievements or trophies playing in this manner. Still, this is a great way to share the experience with a friend, and a generous move from EA to help get the game out to as many people as possible.**



**Above:** The prison break itself only really takes up the first couple of hours – after that the game opens up and a bunch of new gameplay opportunities become available, including driving, stealthing and more.

ERASING THE CONCEPT OF 'PLAYER TWO'

# A Way Out



**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** Xbox One
**OTHER FORMATS:** PS4, PC
**ORIGIN:** Sweden
**PUBLISHER:** EA
**DEVELOPER:** Hazelight Studios
**PRICE:** £24.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 2
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** Yes

**FAQs**

**Q. HOW LONG IS IT?**
There are plenty of distractions along the way, but if you ignore them all you can probably finish in around five hours.

**Q. WHAT DISTRACTIONS?**
Small interactions with the world are a delight, and there are some fun minigames to find as well.

**Q. IS IT CRAP ONLINE?**
No, it works perfectly well, but playing with a pal sitting next to you is definitely more fun.

**It was probably around the time that we were washing up that this game really clicked for us.** We'd just released some horses from a barn so that an elderly couple would leave their home and give us a chance to sneak in and change clothes. Despite having the police hot on our tails, and an armed elderly gentleman (did we mention he was armed?) potentially returning at any moment, there was just too much to see in the house. While our co-op partner twanged away on a banjo, we did the dishes in the kitchen, then turned on the TV and sat down to relax. Later, our partner tried on some hats, drew a moustache on a painting and then – finally – we decided to change clothes and get on with the whole 'prison break' thing.

This is the kind of genius that makes *A Way Out* so memorable. There are small touches all over the beautifully rendered world that will have you laughing out loud and telling your co-op buddy to look at your side of the screen, or head over to where you are to play some darts. Elements like this are everywhere, and both characters have different reactions to each of them, so exploring every nook and cranny is encouraged – and often rewarded with an achievement or trophy.

Of course, these touches would be pointless without a solid foundation. The main thrust of *A Way Out* is much more than a simple story of escape. You and a friend take control of Leo or Vincent, two convicts, drawn together by coincidence and a mutual hatred of a gentleman called Harvey. As the two progress from cellblock neighbours to collaborators in an escape plan, you learn more about their histories, families and reasons for wanting revenge on the man that put them both in jail. The writing is often a little awkward and the acting can sometimes be rather wooden – early on, an inmate shouts "Die! Die! Die" as he stabs a prison guard, making us wonder whether there was a competition to get as many clichés as possible into the script.

**SWEEPING CAMERA MOVEMENTS AND CLEVER DECISIONS HELP MAKE EVERY SCENE AS CINEMATIC AS POSSIBLE**



**Above:** We managed to turn the boat 180 degrees around and travel down half of this level backwards. We were laughing the whole way, but it certainly isn't the recommended way to complete it.




Thankfully, the overall story is solid, motivations are clear and believable and many of the interactions – especially between the two main characters – are natural and fun. The pace is well balanced, too. One minute you'll be creeping through tall grass avoiding the torch beams of guards, the next you'll be sprinting through a forest, skidding down roads in a stolen truck, or paddling through rapids in a flimsy boat. As with Josef Fares' previous title, *Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons*, there is plenty of variety in your experiences here. Expect to be thrown into a new situation with a new mechanic, play through it for five minutes, then never see it again.

The start of the game is fairly heavy on quick-time events, which immediately put us on guard, but the game soon lessened its grip on both players, allowing us some breathing room to explore the world. The Unreal engine mostly does an excellent job here – we tried it on both the Xbox One X and the standard Xbox One, and while there were some slight downgrades in texture quality on the latter, things still looked great. Both consoles suffered from some momentary frame rate dips at times, and there were some odd blur effects when characters moved quickly, but aside from these small blips the game looks fantastic.

And, again, everything you do is incredibly memorable. It's clear that Fares has a movie background, with sweeping camera movements and clever decisions helping to make every scene as cinematic as possible. The split screen allows players shimmying across a ledge both to look up at the policemen searching for them above, and look down to the huge drop below. The frames regularly change size, allowing more focus to be on Vincent or Leo depending on what they're doing. It's a smart, well-executed idea that just serves to make *A Way Out* more unique.

**FINGERPRINT**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

**CO-OP CAPERS:** No other games give you a multiplayer experience like this one. Sit down with a friend next to you and you'll be rewarded with an engaging story and some truly standout moments.

This is the kind of game that doesn't come along very often. It genuinely has a great idea, and doesn't compromise to achieve its vision. You can't play this game alone, and it's better for it. Whether you're online or in couch co-op (we tried both; couch co-op is better), the interactions between you and your buddy are essential, and just make the game more fun. There are points in the game where you'll be asked to make a decision about how you proceed, and the only way to decide is to talk it through. These decisions won't alter the outcome of the game, but will provide different gameplay opportunities, encouraging you to revisit the game later – perhaps with a different partner – and try the other options.

As a result, the game is the ultimate co-op adventure. There is no Player Two here, and the second player doesn't get a trimmed-down experience. You are both integral to the plot of the game, and unless you're both working together there's just no way to complete it. The gameplay reinforces that, and by the halfway point you'll both be having so much fun exploring the world, pointing out awesome stuff to your friend and laughing about the things you're discovering together that the occasionally flimsy writing will fade into the background. It's not perfect, but it's great fun, and we guarantee you won't find anything else like it in gaming. For that reason alone it's well worth a go.




AN UNEXPECTED AND UNFORGETTABLE CO-OP GEM




Left: Each character has a ranged weapon with a light and heavy attack. The former also grants you a small hop, which is great for repositioning. The latter is ideal for delivering a powerful strike from a safe distance.



FIT FOR A KING

# Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom

**JRPGs tend to have targeted audiences, be it die-hard fans of a particular series – like Tales – or those who like to strategise like an anime-loving Winston Churchill – Disgaea, in case you were wondering.** *Ni No Kuni II*, however, feels like a JRPG for *everyone* and, despite aiming broadly, it meets its mark surprisingly well.

The story centres on Evan Pettiwhisker Tildrum, a half-cat boy-king who falls victim to a coup d'état from a pack of conniving rats. At the 11th hour Evan is saved by President Roland, who happens to find himself transported to Evan's kingdom after his world (that is, *our* world) is hit by a missile strike. Evan and Co. then embark on a journey to establish a new realm that does away with all conflict. It sounds like a nonsensical fairytale, but the story and characters are so infectiously endearing that it's hard not to smile and get invested.

The whimsy of the original *Ni No Kuni*'s world remains. However, that's more or less the only thing that's been kept for the sequel. Combat is more hands-on: you take control of one of three party members and slay your quarry utilising light or heavy attacks, as well as four equippable skills. It sounds simple, but that's just the surface. You're also able to pull off a dodge roll that actually has i-frames, and you're supported by higgledies – tiny, collectible, upgradeable creatures that have both passive and active abilities. There's also the Zing system, where you can build up energy in a weapon using regular attacks and then unleash to devestating effect by using a skill.

Evan must also grow his new kingdom, and that means you need to accumulate funds and recruit vassals. This shifts the game into a robust city-building sim, and the more you upgrade your settlement, the more facilities open up to you that enhance your magic, higgledies and equipment. Evan can also take part in lite-RTS battles where you have to use a quartet of battalions to win skirmishes. These, however, are the weakest part of the game. You never fully feel in control of where your units go and it ultimately boils down to ensuring your units beat the enemy in a rock-paper-scissors matchup.

That said, each branch of *Ni No Kuni*'s game design complements one another well. Upgrading your city benefits your party's battle prowess, as well as your army's might. Commanding that army yields loot. And, while adventuring as Evan and his crew, you'll encounter sidequests that will see new characters join your city as workers or fighters. It's a strong ecosystem that offers enough depth to keep you busy throughout your time with the game.

*Ni No Kuni* slips a bit with its presentation, however. The anime-like visuals are great, but they clash with the uncanny chibi aesthetic used for the world map view and RTS battles. It's here where bouts of frame rate drops rear their head, too.

That doesn't stop *Ni No Kuni II* from being an enchanting RPG. Equally accessible as it is in-depth, Level-5 has produced one of the finest examples of the genre this generation. It may not quite be happily ever after, but it's close.

## DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PS4
**OTHER FORMATS:** PC
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Bandai Namco
**DEVELOPER:** Level-5
**PRICE:** £49.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** N/A




## MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

**COMBAT CONTROL:** *Ni no Kuni II*'s combat system is a competent one, however outside of directly assuming there's no way you can control your allies. This is where a *Final Fantasy XII*-like Gambit system would be ideal.



**VERDICT 8/10**
A CLAIMANT TO THE JRPG THRONE

## DETAILS

**FORMAT:** 3DS
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Nintendo
**DEVELOPER:** Creatures
**PRICE:** £29.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** N/A

THE NOT-SO-GREAT MOUSE DETECTIVE

# Detective Pikachu

**For a game that prides itself on the intellect of its eponymous character, *Detective Pikachu* is not the smartest of adventures.** Playing as Tim Goodman, you arrive in the city to look for your missing father, and along the way encounter a talking Pikachu that claims to be a great detective. You soon set off around the city, investigating peculiar cases together.

We have to admit that *Detective Pikachu* is fun and charming, especially as our favourite electric mouse guides us through plenty of puzzles and riddles. This version of Pikachu though is voiced by a grown man, is the brains behind almost every case and adores coffee and beautiful women (we're talking some thirsty levels of comments here, but luckily no one but Tim can hear what he has to say). It's a complete contradiction to the loveable companion from the anime, providing plenty of humour and personality. It's a shame that apart from one or two villains, the other characters, including Tim Goodman, are rather bland.



There's also very little gameplay, which is to be expected of course for a visual-novel type, but with a lack of repercussions for mistakes, and extremely lenient QTEs, you often feel like you're trudging through every case. It's simply too easy and uninspiring, even with the hard mode selected from the start. You never fully feel like you are in control of the investigations as the game forces you into convoluted, 'correct' methods of solving obvious cases before moving on.

In spite of all this, *Detective Pikachu* is still an adorable game with a unique story, and many younger players will no doubt enjoy the adventure. But for those more familiar with the Ace Attorney or Danganronpa series, *Detective Pikachu* can be overly tedious and repetitive.







POKEMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: GATES TO INFINITY

PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY



VERDICT 5/10

A SIMPLIFIED SPIN-OFF THAT MISSES THE MARK

SUPERMASSIVE GAMES MAKES A SUPERMASSIVE MISTAKE

# Bravo Team

**Considering how assured Supermassive Games first VR outing was, it's doing everything it can to suggest *Until Dawn: Rush Of Blood* was actually a complete and utter fluke.** *Bravo Team* has plenty of great ideas, but is bogged down by poor controls, questionable design choices and a high price point that certainly doesn't justify the three to four hours it takes to complete.

The game itself is best played with a second player online because you can at least take enjoyment as you hear them swear and curse at how poor the controls in this cover shooter have been implemented. It doesn't matter what control system you use, all of them feel ineffective, with the motion aim controller constantly refusing to respond to your inputs, particularly when using weapons like the sniper rifle. *Rush Of Blood* worked exceptionally well, even when shooting behind you, but here the game quickly gives up, causing countless deaths as you struggle against the cumbersome controls.

## DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PSVR
**ORIGIN:** UK
**PUBLISHER:** Sony
**DEVELOPER:** Supermassive Games
**PRICE:** £34.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1-2
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** Yes




**Above:** It's worrying how lazy the aiming feels in *Bravo Team*. *Rush Of Blood* wasn't perfect, but it also responded well to your controls, something *Bravo Team* struggles with. It becomes even more problematic later on when you're trying to aim down the sights of a sniper rifle.

Disorientation is an issue, too, as there is no standard movement (despite the aim controller being created for this), meaning you simply teleport from cover to cover, which feels like a backwards step after the strides made in the genre by the excellent *Farpoint*. It's made worse by the fact *Bravo Team* moves to third-person whenever you break for new cover, snapping back in place when you arrive at your destination. It's tremendously distracting and can again lead to a quick death if you're not immediately aware of your surroundings.

It's a pity that so much of *Bravo Team* feels half-baked, as there's a genuinely solid cover-based shooter at its core that comes close to being *Time Crisis* for the VR generation (particularly when you play the included arcade mode). It's not to be, however, and the end result is a bland blaster that feels like a gigantic step back for both Supermassive Games and VR games in general.

ACE BANANA




UNTIL DAWN: RUSH OF BLOOD

VERDICT 4/10

AN OVERPRICED, UNDERDEVELOPED DISAPPOINTMENT

**Above:** There's enough choice as to the stages you take on with each island that skilled players can stage the odds in their favour.

AND TEACH THEM HOW TO WAR

# Into The Breach




**Spare a thought for the indie darlings.** *FTL: Faster Than Light*, and by virtue its developer Subset Games, carries a significant weight upon its shoulders; it was a milestone in the indie renaissance, a recognisable Kickstarter success and proof that there was demand for strategy games. It is nothing short of a pioneer, and rightfully garnered an equivalent success. The problem with such titles, however, is that these history lessons play a big part in what comes next, already forging an idea of what to anticipate from the developer's follow-up title. At best this can build hype, but at worst it can unfairly create an expectation that the developer neither wants nor intends to match. While Subset Games is really banking on its history with *FTL* when it comes to the marketing for *Into The Breach*, it might lead some to expect things from the latest game that it is not intending to produce.

On the surface it's easy to see the comparison, too: both are strategy games, both are roguelike in design and both limit the player's functions to dilute the tactical depth to its essence. It won't be long until the difference is clear, however; *Into The Breach* is perhaps better considered a puzzle game. The premise itself is fairly simple: each stage has five turns, and with only three mechs to hand you must carefully protect the map's residents – alongside completing any additional bonus objectives – from the attacking bug-like Vek. With only one action and one move per turn, it becomes necessary to sit and think about each step with great deliberation, to plot out each move and any ensuing interactions with great consideration. In fact, this is perhaps the game's greatest asset, because not only must you maximise the damage of your limited squad, but you will need to consider the rounds that follow, too. When you're up against it, this means either enacting a plan that limits the casualties or deliberating on every single possible option to ensure the greatest efficiency – and that's when the game really gets the synapses flaring. Every one of the game's mechanics tie into one another, too; it is one of those games where it is simple to pick up and figure out, but the systems are so neatly tied into each other that there's always more than one thing to think about when making an action

**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** PC
**ORIGIN:** US
**PUBLISHER:** Subset Games
**DEVELOPER:** In-house
**PRICE:** £11.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1
**MINIMUM SPEC:** 1.7GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, Intel HD 3000 GPU/OpenGL 2.1 support, 300MB disk space
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** N/A

IT'S NECESSARY TO SIT AND THINK ABOUT EACH STEP WITH GREAT DELIBERATION, AND THAT REALLY GETS THE SYNAPSES FLARING

## FAQs

**Q. AS HARD AS FTL?**
Actually, no. *Into The Breach* is far more forgiving than some of the random – and frankly unfair – aspects of *FTL*.

**Q. QUICK TO FINISH?**
You'll likely reach the final fight once you've got to grips with the core systems, perhaps on your third or fourth timeline. At that point it's all down to equipment.

**Q. A LOT OF REPLAYABILITY?**
If you're into challenging yourself with different handicaps or a higher difficulty then sure, but even then, after the 15-hour mark you'll find the sense of repetition setting in.



Below: Some missions come with added things to think about, sometimes beneficial and sometimes detrimental. They add an extra dimension to the map, and add to the spinning plates of things you need to think about when devising a plan.






Above: The final battle really throws everything it can at you, and if you're not smart about your plans then you can find yourself easily dropping the ball here. It helps if you've got a well-upgraded team of mechs, of course. Left: The key to surviving any battle is being as effective with your attacks as possible, pushing enemies into dangers.

– creating tactical complexity in the process. It's a symbiotic set of mechanics, and that typically makes for the best strategy games.

There's an overarching game to complete, too, presented under the guise of time travel. Your mechs can level up to gain improvements, while new pilots with unique skills can be discovered along the way. The limitation here, however, is that only one pilot can be kept when starting a new timeline, so there is an element of randomness to each playthrough. Sometimes you may have a solid arsenal of equipment at your disposal, other times the RNG fails to keep you strong enough to make it to the final battle. The mechs themselves can be tweaked to a degree, too, and again this is a smartly honed dynamic that ensures you're never quite as powerful as you'd like to be. There is some disappointment in the restrictions surrounding the machines themselves, since they can't be customised quite as freely as might be expected for a mech game, especially considering that each timeline is limited to a preset 'squad'. This, however, is where much of the game gets its replayability, since each team comes with its own unique advantages and disadvantages. The initial set are all-rounders, a trio of a melee damage-dealer, a ranged tank and artillery useful for pushing enemy units around the map. Later unlockable squads might instead focus on manipulating the Vek's positions, utilise shields instead of damage output or simply have a penchant for burning everything around them. *Into The Breach* misses out by failing to leverage true mech customisation – which is more of a missed opportunity than a detriment to the experience – but for those willing to test their own adaptability these additional teams add further longevity to the title.

And that may be where the biggest sticking point for *Into The Breach* comes from. For as finely crafted as the turn-based combat is and for as cleverly refined as each of the game's systems are, it quickly begins to feel like a slog. It doesn't have *FTL*'s sense of variety, partly because it relies so heavily on its puzzle-like combat system to entertain but primarily because each mission ends up feeling by and large the same. The goal is, ultimately, always to drop in, destroy the Vek and spare lives. The minutiae changes – perhaps you're protecting a train, perhaps you have mechs focused on ranged attacks, perhaps you're fighting armoured enemy units – but very little else about it does, from beginning to end, timeline after timeline. And so it really does ask players to become invested solely in the *mechanics* of the game, and that isn't always an easy ask. It may be unfair to compare the latest from Subset Games to its predecessor since it is clear that the two are not the same sort of experience, but the truth is it's hard to imagine anyone getting the same 100+ hours that they managed to squeeze out of *FTL* from *Into The Breach* – and that's likely to be an expectation that is already imparted onto fans. It's a stellar puzzle strategy game, that is for certain, but you'll need to be a self-motivated gamer to get the most out of it.

## SYNTHESIS
### BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

**MIX IT UP:** There's all sorts of flavours here, whether that's classic tactics RPG combat, puzzle-game elements with the reliance on smart planning or roguelike gameplay in its replayability.

## ON THE GRID

With four islands and a final fight to battle through, everything is tied to a persistent power grid. For each structure destroyed a representative bar decreases, and should that reach zero then it's game over. This is a smart mechanic because it creates an overarching threat to watch out for beyond avoiding damage, but it's more than just that. Each island, for example, offers a variety of stages, some with the potential to earn more power for the grid, others to earn reputation that can be used to enhance your squad. This means there's a necessary balancing act between trying to fill that power bar (which earns its own benefits when overcharging) to earning more skill points to strengthen your squad. A very smart system.






AN EXCEPTIONAL STRATEGY GAME BUT NEEDS MORE VARIETY

FRIENDS MAKE IT EASY

# Kirby Star Allies

**Some things in gaming do not change, and one of them is that playing a Kirby game is like existing inside the dream of a Krispy Kreme Doughnut.** Everything is bright, clean and sugary. Tasty, but sadly short-lived. We're not sure this metaphor has legs left in it, but suffice to say, it can be a bit much, but that's part of why we like them.

Kirby as a character is almost defined by his lack of abilities, save one: the ability to suck pretty much anything into his gut. And then, in most cases, he can do whatever they did, from sword-fighting to using a magic paintbrush. *Kirby Star Allies* smartly attempts to mix that formula up a little. Not because the formula was getting tired though, but rather because the Switch and its easy access to co-op gameplay opens up new opportunities for mixing in some multi-character fun. So now Kirby can capture enemies and have them join his crew. Up to three newly brainwashed (but with love and snuggling, so it's cool) creatures join up with you, and now you have a whole suite of powers to choose from and combinations therein.

And this is probably the best thing about *Kirby Star Allies*. Working out from the base abilities of the game's various companions which ones will combine in the most interesting ways, solving puzzles with specific combinations to reach new secrets, it all plays very satisfyingly when that clicks. Less satisfying is when a very specific powerset is required and you don't have it to hand and it's not in reach either. It means that there's a reason to go back and play over levels again to make sure you've collected puzzle pieces and found the unlock buttons for additional levels, but then you realise that's pretty much the only reason to go back.

The trouble is that *Kirby Star Allies* isn't a particularly engaging platformer to explore. The levels, while undoubtedly colourful and gorgeously rendered, are uniformly bland in their construction. There's some leaping, a bit of swimming, sometimes a little back and forth, culminating in a boss battle before you move on to the next thing. None of the stages really filled us with any joy. Kirby was cute as ever, the powers were fun, but the stage for these things to shine falls flat again and again.

And while some additional fun can be had by sharing the experience in co-op and even diving into some of the minigames, the fact is that Kirby is easy enough in single-player and it only gets easier in multiplayer. The lack of challenge just hoovers up any remaining hope that this could live up to its best ideas.

**DETAILS**

**FORMAT:** Switch
**ORIGIN:** Japan
**PUBLISHER:** Nintendo
**DEVELOPER:** HAL Laboratory
**PRICE:** £49.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1-4
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** No

BETTER THAN

SUPER LUCKY'S TALE



WORSE THAN

YOSHI'S WOOLLY WORLD





Above: Team abilities aren't anywhere near as numerous as we had hoped. There are three key ones (forming a bridge, a wheel and gliding around on a star) and while they offer some potentially fun puzzles on occasion they're as light as everything else in this game.

## FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

**POWER PLAY:** Combining the abilities and the complimentary move sets of different characters certainly gives *Kirby Star Allies* some added interest, creating both tactical play (to some extent) and replay value.

**VERDICT 6/10**

WELL CRAFTED, BUT LACKING DEPTH



Above: Minigames for up to four players offer a little distraction between journeys through the cosmos with Kirby. They're more or less Mario Party staples and interesting enough, but don't add a huge amount to the overall experience.

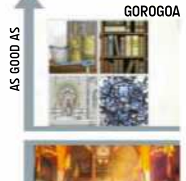


DETAILS

**FORMAT:** iOS
**ORIGIN:** Australia
**PUBLISHER:** Annapurna Interactive
**DEVELOPER:** Mountains
**PRICE:** £2.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** N/A

AS GOOD AS

GOROGOA



WORSE THAN



WHAT REMAINS OF EDITH FINCH

ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY

# Florence

**As a work of interactive fiction, *Florence* is powerful.** Leaping between states of beauty and fragility, *Florence* is a meditation on love and loss in the modern world, though its story is one built around timeless relatability. Heartbreak and rebirth permeate throughout the entirety of the experience; *Florence* is a rare example of a videogame depicting the emotional highs and lows of a relationship with incredible nuance and precision. You haven't played anything like *Florence* before.

It takes just 40 minutes for developer Mountains to capture your heart and release it to the wind. *Florence* makes its case for it being better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all, and it makes it quickly. While we were desperate to experience more in this gorgeous watercolour world, in which all interactions take the form of simplistic touch-based minigames, *Florence* never outstays its welcome, and to that we congratulate Mountains – few games offer this level of restraint in their central premise or execution.

Those minigames are worth noting because – and we're being careful not to spoil them too much here – it's incredible how each and every interaction in the game perfectly reflects the state of the relationship between the two starring characters, and in how it effortlessly captures the feeling and mood of each scene. *Florence* is a time capsule; it captures but a small slice of life. But therein lies its brilliance. It's the simplicity, elegance, focus and – most integrally here – the intimacy it captures through its moments that helps elevate this piece of interactive art beyond any of its contemporaries.



VERDICT 9/10
A STUNNING WORK OF INTERACTIVE ART



Above: *Florence* does a fantastic job of capturing the highs and lows of a first love. An exploratory and intelligent exploration of what it means to fall headfirst into a relationship.

TURN-BASED FUN THAT DOESN'T GET OLD

# Pit People

**Combining strategy with role-playing elements, *Pit People* reminds us that simplistic turn-based combat can be an enjoyable and fulfilling experience.** Recruiting an array of strange species and slotting them into our party may give us the impression that we are in control, but this quickly changes on the battlefield. Here we find an unpredictable twist in which some interactions are left in the hands of our party; move them to a tile and they will decide who they attack or heal.

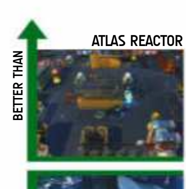
Propelling us into a wacky plot filled with sarcastic space bears and unconventional heroes, The Behemoth has showcased its talent of making even the weirdest things look cute. Striking a good balance between action and narrative, this kept us engaged and entertained while creating sufficient breaks from the turn-based strategy sections. Here we're left with a great deal of variety in a story mode that strives to go beyond back-to-back monotonous combat.

DETAILS

**FORMAT:** Xbox One
**OTHER FORMATS:** PC
**ORIGIN:** San Diego, California
**PUBLISHER:** The Behemoth
**DEVELOPER:** In-house
**PRICE:** £15.99
**RELEASE:** Out now
**PLAYERS:** 1-2 (1-4 Online)
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** Yes

BETTER THAN

ATLAS REACTOR



WORSE THAN



XCOM 2



Above: Collect them all! Recruiting new members is a rewarding experience and building a strong team will pay off in the long run.

Adding the option to play the story solo or co-op, including PvP and an online 2v2 mode, it would be an understatement to say that *Pit People* provides us with plenty of content. Nonetheless, a few of these modes left a lot to be desired. While jumping into the story with a friend was pleasant enough, this added little enhancement to the overall experience, and in some cases felt like more of a hindrance. We preferred to play most of the story solo. Despite the effort that has been put into supporting 2v2 matches online, the arena is also disappointingly quiet, resulting in us struggling to find others to play with. Thankfully, the 'Unfair Challenge' can be played offline, and is a great exercise for testing out the synergies in your team.

*Pit People*'s easy-to-grasp mechanics, crazy story and assortment of modes are very easy to get sucked into. It may not deliver the same level of precision and polish exhibited in other titles in the genre, yet its imperfections seem to add to its charm.

VERDICT 7/10
SIMPLE HOOKS THAT HELD OUR ATTENTION



Left: The presentation throughout *Moss* is faultless. It's arguably one of the best-looking games in VR, and is enhanced by a tremendous storybook aesthetic that reminds you of a good old-fashioned bedtime story.

PSVR HAS A BRAND NEW CHAMPION

# Moss

**One of the things we love about virtual reality is the way that it can offer you an experience that you simply can't achieve with a traditional videogame.** *Moss* is one such game, and while it doesn't reinvent the rulebook, it does deliver an interaction with your gaming avatar that few other games have ever come close to matching.

Forget the bond you shared with Trico in *The Last Guardian*, or the interactions you had with Elizabeth in *Bioshock Infinite* – they pale in comparison with the closeness you'll feel to Quill as you join her on epic four-hour adventure. Taking on the role of a reader (who looks suspiciously like *Spirited Away*'s No-Face) your task is to guide Quill through a number of single-screen locations that effectively work as self-contained puzzles. While you have full control over Quill, you can also use the motion sensor on the PS4 pad to manipulate various items in Quill's miniature world. Pillars can be pushed and pulled and blocks dragged and shunted as you help Quill navigate her way around the puzzle-based locations. As Quill's adventure continues, she comes into contact with robotic insects that come in a variety of shapes and sizes. At their worst they become impassable checkpoints, hindering Quill until she has killed a set amount of them. Things get better once you realise you can possess many of them, allowing you to drag and pull them around the stages, triggering switches or using them to hit objects that are otherwise out of reach.

All of this has been done in videogames before of course, but here you feel like a tangible, important part of Quill's diminutive world. That sense of belonging is empathised further by the way Quill interacts with you. She's delightful enough just scampering around each area, but there are numerous instances where she's actively aware that you're there with her, like the way she'll jump if you accidentally get behind her without her realising, or when she beckons for your attention, pointing out potential hints when you get stuck on a particularly taxing puzzles. Said puzzles won't stump you for long, but there's tremendous satisfaction when you do complete them, and it's made sweeter by the encouragement Quill gives you once they are solved.

*Moss* is also helped along by top-notch presentation, utilising a storybook motif that extends to a single narrator voicing all the characters in Polyarc's tale. It works brilliantly, further drawing you in to *Moss*' charming intoxicating world. It might only weigh in at four hours, but they represent some of the best that the fledgling format has currently offered. Here's hoping Quill's adventures continue.

**VERDICT 9/10**

**A DELIGHTFUL ADVENTURE AND EXCELLENT VR SHOWCASE**

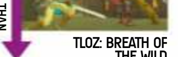
## DETAILS

**FORMAT:** PSVR
**ORIGIN:** United States
**PUBLISHER:** Polyarc
**DEVELOPER:** In-house
**PRICE:** £24.99
**RELEASE:** Out Now
**PLAYERS:** 1
**ONLINE REVIEWED:** N/A

BETTER THAN
ROBOT RESCUE







WORSE THAN
TLOZ: BREATH OF THE WILD

## MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

**IMPROVED COMBAT:** There's a lot of combat in *Moss*, and it can get a little frustrating at times due to Quill's limited moveset.

Below: Longevity comes in the form of scrolls. Initially you'll be able to find many of them by just smashing objects, but as play progresses you'll have to become more inventive, including standing up to look over and behind the environment.








**"I think that's what games are all about, creating a completely alternate universe that you can just be set loose in"**

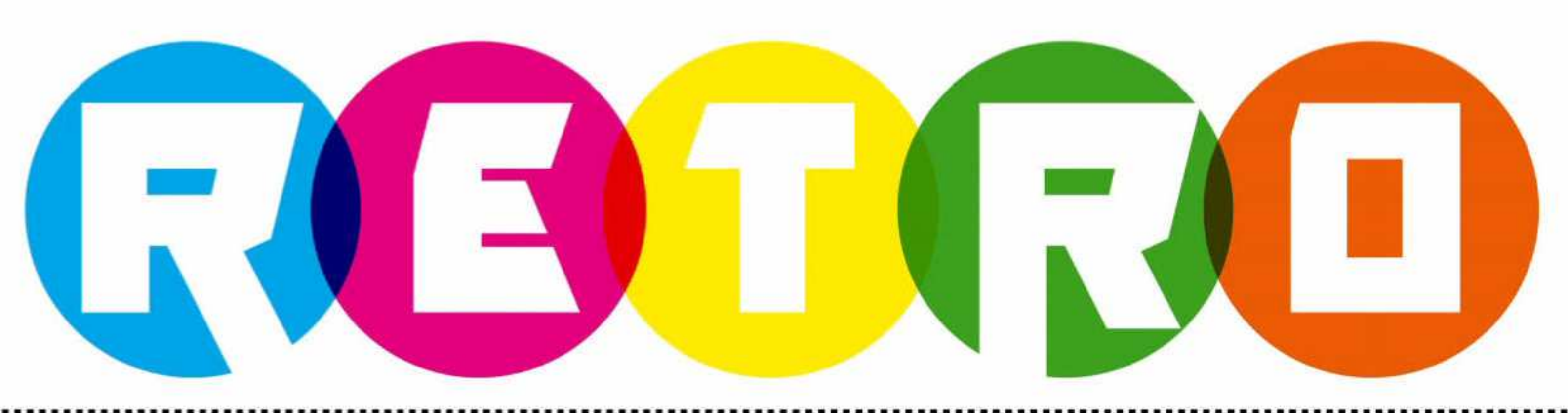
**JESPER KYD, COMPOSER**



## WHY I ❤... DISHONORED 2

JESPER KYD, COMPOSER

*At the moment I really love* Dishonored 2. *I still haven't made my way all the way through it.* Dishonored *was such a blast and I like that world they've created. I mean, what's with the whale oil anyway? I just love it. It's so crazy. I think that's what games are all about, creating a completely alternate universe that you can just be set loose in. My favourite games are usually more open-world type games, but* Dishonored 2 *is one of them for sure.*




NO.199



DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro and much more on our dedicated forum **forum.gamestm.co.uk**



# THE RETRO GUIDE TO... MASTERTRONIC

Mastertronic helped invent the idea of budget games and became a dominant videogame publisher in the process. Join us as we revist the highs and lows

MASTERTRONIC WAS AN unusual company when it launched in 1983, as it was set up by businessmen rather than games developers. Martin Alper, Frank Herman, Alan Sharam and Terry Medway and the quartet had one aim – to sell games as cheaply as possible, and it was a huge success.

Its first games sold for an eye-wateringly low £1.99, with later budget releases rising slowly in price, but always being profitable for the company. Mastertronic became a huge success, helped further by the fact that strong distribution allowed the games to find their way into all sorts of shops, including newsagents, garages and convenience stores, and eventually into bigger stores like HMV and WHSmith.

As the company expanded, it created new labels like MAD (Mastertronic Added Dimension), Bulldog Software and Ricochet, and would go on to support 16-bit systems and beyond. Here, we're specifically focusing on the company's golden 8-bit period. How many of the following did you play through or own?




## MUNCH MANIA 1984

COMMODORE 64

In the early days of the home computing market, many fledgling developers cut their teeth by emulating the games they played in their local arcades. Copyright infringement was only just coming in to play, meaning many publishers were able to release shameless clones without fear of reprisal from the original owners. *Munch Mania* is one such example, shamelessly riffing off the 1980 hit, *Pac-Man*. The maze is a little smaller, and the AI of the ghosts is nowhere near the quality of the arcade originals, but it still proves to be a surprising amount of fun, and runs at a good rate. It's arguably the best unofficial clone of the game on C64.





## BIONIC GRANNY 1984

COMMODORE 64

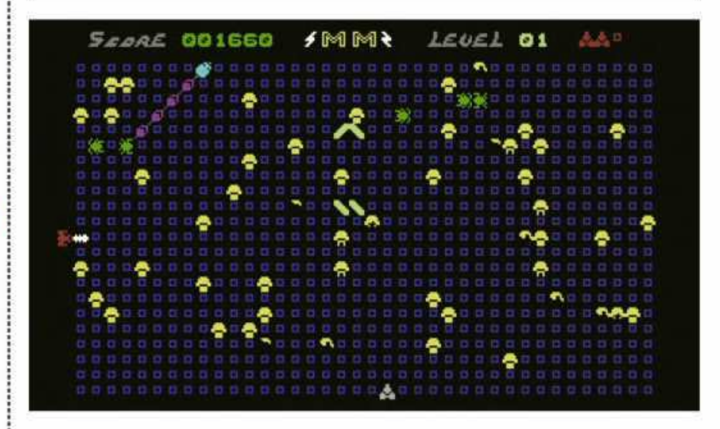
Considering the sheer number of games that Mastertronic churned out during the Eighties, you were always going to get the odd stinker that snuck through quality control. *Bionic Granny* is one such title, a game so terrible that we've seen posts on popular C64 websites where purchasers of the game suggest that the developers deserve to die. We certainly don't agree with threats like that, but we do agree that it's an atrocity that should have never seen the light of day. The graphics are universally weak with naff perspective and poor animation, and the game itself is little better, and effectively promotes child abuse as you're playing a granny who must wallop kids with a stick as they leave school. The school's lollipop lady is the only person not cool with this, and will try to hit you with her signs. A horrendous, mean-spirited game that would never be released in today's market.




## VEGAS JACKPOT 1984

VARIOUS

Before it became Magnetic Fields, the development house formed by Andrew Morris and Shaun Southern was known as Mr Chip Software. This is one of the duo's most successful games under Mastertronic, and essentially emulates a fruit machine. We've never really understood the appeal of gambling for fake money, and there's a distinct lack of subgames, but we still managed to waste 35 minutes playing it.




## SPECTIPEDE 1984

VARIOUS

Memorable for its cool cover art, *Spectipede* is a solid take on *Centipede* and another early clone, this time by Tony Kelly. While it's not quite as good as Jeff Minter's own take on the game, *Gridrunner* (in fact, it has a few influences), it remains a solid little adaptation that retains all the key ingredients of the original Atari arcade game, so expect plenty of frantic bug blasting as you chase that high score.







## FORMULA ONE SIMULATOR 1985

VARIOUS

According to research done by Mastertronic historian, Anthony Guter, this simple arcade racing game was the most successful game the company produced, with sales of over 57,000 units. Coded by Mr Chip Software, it started off on the C16 before moving to the Commodore 64. The best thing about it is an incredibly funky tune by C64 maestro, Rob Hubbard.

## CHILLER 1985

**VARIOUS**

Before they hit the big time with Codemasters, David and Richard Darling released a number of games for Mastertronic. One of the best-selling games the duo unveiled during this period was *Chiller*. It's actually a fairly basic platformer, with fiddly controls that requires you to collect all the crosses found in each location. It's quite technically proficient, however, and early versions of the game featured a rendition of Michael Jackson's number one hit, *Thriller*.




## FINDERS KEEPERS 1985

**VARIOUS**

David Jones had an extremely prolific career during the early Eighties, but is perhaps best known for his Magic Knight series. The first, *Finders Keepers*, is notably different to the games that followed, but features the same distinctive graphical style. While it appears to be very similar to games like *Jet Set Willy*, there's a lot more going on thanks to the ability to combine items you collect and then trade with the various characters you meet. It was released across various systems, including the MSX and C16.







## ACTION BIKER 1985

**VARIOUS**

Licences were a huge deal for videogame publishers during the Eighties and Nineties, which is why games like *Action Biker* exist. Created to tie in with KP Skips and featuring KP's mascot, Clumsy Colin it's notable because the Spectrum release is very different to the C64 and Atari 8-bit versions. While all three games feature the same gameplay mechanics of riding around Colin's hometown in search of items to improve his motorcycle, completely different viewpoints are used. The Spectrum game also has a bizarre dream subplot, which is incorporated into the game.











## KANE 1985

**VARIOUS**

This entertaining cowboy romp was created by John Darnell and set in the Wild West. It's effectively a multi-section action game that puts you in the spurred boots of the Sheriff of Kane (which is a reference to the Gary Cooper western, *High Noon*). The first level sees you shooting down ducks with a bow and arrow, while stage two has you racing back to the town of Kane on horseback. Stage 3 is a shootout against various no-good miscreants, while the final section is another race on horseback, this time to stop a train. While it was ported to numerous formats at the time, only the C64, Spectrum and Amstrad outings feature all four stages.

## ONE MAN AND HIS DROID 1985

**VARIOUS**

This interesting action puzzler from Clive Brooker has you rounding up ramboids on the planet Anromadus across 20 increasingly difficult levels. Your droid has several abilities, and is able to dig, fly or tunnel in order to round up the missing ramboids, It's made trickier by the fact they need to be herded in a specific order, as you won't be able to progress to the next stage until at least four of them are in the correct position. It's tricky, but tremendously satisfying.



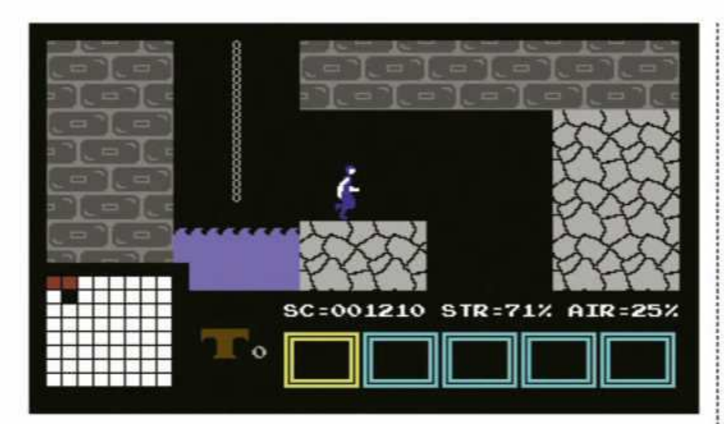





## THE LAST V8 1985

**VARIOUS**

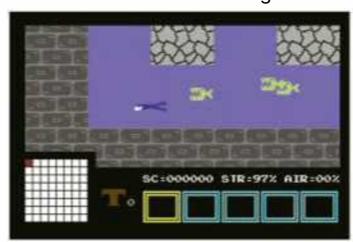
This controversial release from David Darling is notable for several reasons. It was the first game to launch Mastertronic's new £2.99 MAD label, had an absolutely sensational soundtrack by Rob Hubbard, along with a stunning looking cover that makes it highly collectible. What a pity, then, that the game itself is something of a mess. It boasts some smart presentation, but the tiny playing area, cumbersome controls and high difficulty level make it a real pain to make any progress. We were amused to hear it's set in 2008, seven years after World War III, though.




## HERO OF THE GOLDEN TALISMAN 1985

VARIOUS

Shaun Southern continued to explore different genres under the MAD label, and *Hero* was his take on the action adventure genre. It's not the prettiest looking of games, but it plays extremely well as you seek out the five missing pieces of a fabled talisman. There are all sorts of dangerous enemies to avoid and puzzles to solve, and it's possible for your hero to swim in certain areas. He's armed with a gun as well, but some creatures, such as dragons soak up a large number of bullets, so are best avoided. The game itself is huge, with over 500 rooms to explore, meaning you received plenty of value for your £2.99.

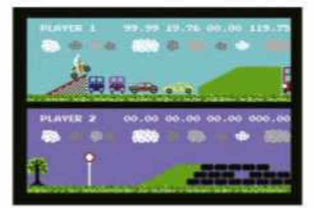





## KIKSTART 1985

VARIOUS

More magic from Shaun Southern, this time in the form of an excellent motorbike trials game. Heavily inspired by the TV series, *Kick Start*, the aim is to complete one of eight obstacle courses in as quick a time as possible. It's made more difficult by the fact that you simply can't race through each stage, and must carefully negotiate certain obstacles. While it originally started off on the C16, that version is quite different, requiring you to burst balloons. The best aspect of the game is its excellent multiplayer mode, which gives it a highly competitive edge. A big success on release, an even better sequel, *Kikstart II*, was released in 1987, which featured improved graphics and an excellent level editor.



# MASTERING MASTERTRONIC

## Simon Plumbe on collecting the range



**Why collect Mastertronic games?**

Because of the price, they were a big part of my games collection during my childhood, and when I restarted my Commodore 64 collection again a few years ago it was only natural that Mastertronic would be a part of that. I only started collecting seriously when my wife bought me a large bundle of 40 Mastertronic games for Valentine's Day two years ago, and it just snowballed from there.

**Who was the best developer and why?**

There were so many, but at a push I'd say David Jones. Consistently great games and a great ambassador for the company.

**Tell us about the Facebook group you set up.**

I've been a member of a lot of retro gaming groups for a while, and made friends with quite a few fellow Mastertronic collectors, but there wasn't anywhere for all of us to gather in one place online, so I set up an unofficial group in September 2016. Since then we've attracted fans from all over the world, along with former Mastertronic staff and developers, forming a fantastic online community. Find us at the Mastertronic Collectors Group.

**Do you think a variety of genres is one of the label's best strengths?**

Absolutely. There was always something for everyone, whether you were into arcade shoot-em-ups, text adventures, platform games or any other genre, and with plenty of releases each month you didn't have to wait long before something came out.

**Are there any games that are proving hard to find?**

The hardest ones at the moment are the American disk-only games for the Commodore 64, the Spanish DroSoft re-releases and the Holy Grail that I'd love for the collection, *Planet 10*, which only had a handful of copies made for the press as review copies.

**What's the most money you've spent on a Mastertronic game?**

So far the most has been about £40 on *Little Computer People* for the Amiga or *Heavy Metal Paradroid* for the C64.

**What advice would you give to would-be collectors?**

Start small! Pick your favourite system and just buy games that you want to play. The common ones were produced in massive quantities, so they're easy to find. If you're bitten by the bug, just expand out either in terms of quantity or platforms, but most focus on a single system.

**Do you collect the variant later labels as well?**

Yeah, I collect everything they've released, as well as modern titles from the relaunched Mastertronic Group, so it's quite time-consuming finding everything.

**Why do you think the company remains so popular?**

Apart from the obvious nostalgia and fond memories people have, there were some genuinely great games. Mastertronic was a true innovator, shaping the entire concept of entry-priced gaming when the rest of the industry was pushing prices up. We've got a lot to thank them for, even to this day.



# STE PICKFORD FEUDS

## How popular Mastertronic title, Feud, came to be

**Feud was based on feuding brothers. Was this a case of art imitating life?**
Yeah, definitely. We grew up in a small two bedroom terrace house, and had to share a tiny bedroom – the size of a box room – with bunk beds in, so we were on top of each other as teenagers growing up, without any space of our own. We were always arguing at home. At work we were fine though, and always got on quite well I seem to remember.

**How was *Feud* different to your earlier games?**
*Feud* was the first game design we ever sold. Game projects were generally given to the development team to make with either a title, a licence or a one-sentence brief (a hang gliding game, a space battle game, etc) and designing the game wasn't seen as a separate job; it was something that the programmers, or the programmer and artist, would work out between themselves as part of their planning. The idea of a game design document or a game designer, separate from the development team, didn't really exist back then. Although it probably happened simultaneously at other studios around the world, at Binary we had to invent the concept of a game designer, and of a game design document, from scratch, and there was some resistance.

**Why did you design so many different loading screens?**
I was feeling arty! I really wanted to do something special with the loading screens, as I was proud of the game. I pretentiously made the Amstrad screen square, as I didn't think I should be restricted by the arbitrary size of a computer screen. I suppose I was aiming for something like a classic album cover. I was trying to capture the mood and feel of the game, rather than just duplicate the cover in pixels (we never saw the covers until after release anyway – and they were always rubbish with Mastertronic!). The Amstrad one was my 'real' design, but I'd used loads of colours, and I knew that wouldn't look great on the Spectrum, so I put the extra effort in to design a completely different loading screen that was more suited to the Spectrum screen, with more pixelly stipple, and less colour.

**Was the map important while designing the game?**
Yeah, the area map was designed as part of the game design before development began. It was part of the game design that we were pitching to the studio boss. This was really unusual for us at the time. Usually any design work didn't start until development of the game began, and even then it was rare for us to map something so large on paper rather than just make screens within the game or within a game-specific editor. I've still got the original paper version of the map here somewhere!

**Did you realise you'd made an early example of a deathmatch against AI opponents at the time?**
At the time no, but later on we did realise, and we've been banging on about it ever since. 'We invented the AI bot deathmatch, you know!' Nobody believes us.

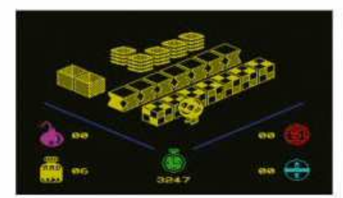
**Would you ever consider a sequel?**
We'd love to revisit the core ideas, but if we ever did something like a sequel or remake it would be quite different. We had one idea that would be based on interlocking gardens with multiple players, and perhaps even a dynamically changing world, but it was ambitious and a bit beyond our resources at the moment.

## MOLECULE MAN 1986

**VARIOUS**

Isometric games were extremely popular on 8-bit micros, and came in a variety of different forms. This entertaining effort from Robin Thompson isn't easy, but offers plenty to do as you try and navigate your way through the 256 screens. Coins are littered around the maze, which can be used to buy bombs that in turn will open up new areas of the labyrinth. Oh, and you can't finish the game until you've picked up 16 circuits. While the time limit is bad enough, additional trouble comes in the form of your ever-depleting anti-rad pills that must be continually topped up to stop you from dying.





## KNIGHT TYME 1986

**VARIOUS**

The third game in David Jones' popular *Magic Knight* series is arguably one of the best. Like its predecessor, *Spellbound*, it utilises the rather neat 'Windimation' system, which allows you to issue text commands via the options available in each command window. It's better refined over *Spellbound*'s, allowing you to concentrate on solving the clever adventure that have been created by David. The plot follows on directly from *Spellbound*, and sees Magic Knight having to deal with being stranded on the USS Pisces in the 25th century after rescuing the wizard, Gimbal. It's far more puzzle-orientated than *Spellbound*, requiring you to create items like ID cards in order to process. It's also possible to use the USS Pisces to travel around to different planets, which further opens up *Magic Knight*'s world, although it is possible to run out of fuel, which ends the game. The final game in the series, *Stormbringer*, was released in 1987.







## 180 1986

**VARIOUS**

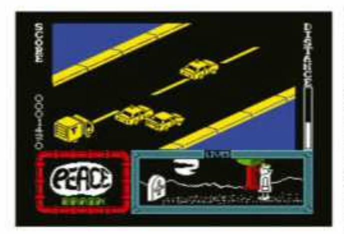
The Pickford brothers worked on a number of games for Mastetronic, including this fun take on darts where Ste Pickford created the game's entertaining graphics. Programmed by Andy Routledge, *180* features an interesting mechanic where you have to control a constantly moving hand in order to throw your darts. The AI (depicted by numerous caricatures) can be a little too challenging at times, but there's endless entertainment due to the available multiplayer mode.

## STORM 1986

**VARIOUS**

This garish *Gauntlet* clone reminds us of *Into The Eagle's Nest* or *Druid*, but isn't quite as satisfying to play through. While there's a plot involving kidnapped princesses and villains with funny names, it's really an excuse to hack your way through an insane number of screens in order to collect three snake brooches. The control system feels a little fiddly at first, but the game itself is entertaining enough, particularly with a second player in tow.





## AGENT X 1987

**ZX SPECTRUM**

■ This multi-load game casts you as a secret agent on the tail of Professor X. Stage one is an isometric racing game, the second stage copies the old arcade brawler, *Kung Fu Master*, while level three has you shooting down targets at a shooting range. The final stage places you in a helicopter and requires you to pick up a bomb and take it deep into the Professor's base. It holds up incredibly well, which is more than we can say for its disappointing sequel, *Agent X II*.

## MILK RACE 1987

**VARIOUS**

■ The Milk Race was a popular 1,000-mile cycle race across England that ended in 1993. This fine offering from 1987 emulates the race from its beginnings in Newcastle upon Tyne to the finishing post in London. While it sounds like a joystick waggler, *Milk Race* is a more strategic affair, and it's all about ensuring you have the right gears and speed for whatever gradient you're tackling. It's a pity then that the opponent AI is quite cheap, and rarely gets affected by the hazards that hinder you.



## FEUD 1987

**VARIOUS**

■ Released via Mastertronic's Bulldog label, this is arguably one of the best 8-bit games from the Pickford brothers. Playing as one of two rival wizard brothers, you must race around the landscape looking for the herbs and plants that will allow you to create deadly spells. Once crafted at your cauldron, you can hunt your brother down and attempt to put him into the ground. *Feud* not only holds up exceptionally well today, it's also a game concept we could easily see working today on modern machines. It's best to avoid the C64 version though, which was ruined by poor AI for the enemy wizard.



## SPORE 1987

**VARIOUS**

■ This intriguing shooter has a fair amount of puzzle elements to it, and is certainly worth seeking out. Seen from overhead, the idea of each level is to clear all the barrels found there and ward off attacks from the energy-sapping spores. Each level has barriers that must be deactivated before you continue, meaning a fair amount of strategy, as well as good reflexes, are required to clear each stage.

## GAPLUS 1988

**VARIOUS**

■ Mastertronic didn't licence many arcade games, but this sterling effort from Digital Design is certainly one of its better releases. While it lacks the vertical orientation of the arcade original, the team of Ashley Routledge and David Saunders certainly managed to capture the gameplay mechanics of Namco's arcade hit. The challenging stages and enemy capturing are all included, and there's an entertaining tune from Maniacs Of Noise, which we'd argue is better than the arcade originals.



## RASTER RUNNER 1989

**VARIOUS**

■ The light cycle battle in *Tron* has inspired countless videogame developers, including Hitech Studio. Taking control of a light cycle, you need to speed off and hope that you can kill your opponent by forcing him to crash into the light trail you leave behind you. While the core game is let down by some weak AI, it becomes incredibly competitive when played against a friend. It does take a while to get used to the speed, though.

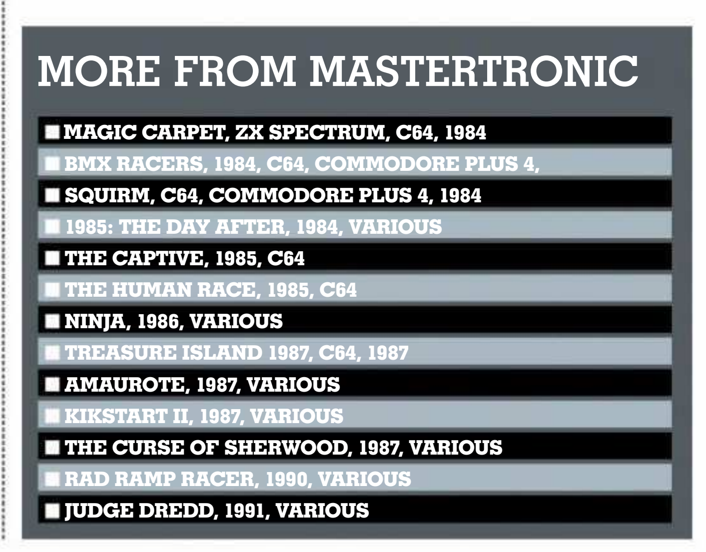




## 3D PINBALL: PINBALL POWER 1989

**VARIOUS**

■ We're suckers for a good pinball game, so we had to include this late offering. It utilises a 3D-style view to give you a full overview of the table, and boasts some rather authentic ball physics as well as a solid bumper feel, which can be tricky. There's only one actual table on offer, but it's well featured and will take a while to master.



## MORE FROM MASTERTRONIC

- MAGIC CARPET, ZX SPECTRUM, C64, 1984
- BMX RACERS, 1984, C64, COMMODORE PLUS 4,
- SQUIRM, C64, COMMODORE PLUS 4, 1984
- 1985: THE DAY AFTER, 1984, VARIOUS
- THE CAPTIVE, 1985, C64
- THE HUMAN RACE, 1985, C64
- NINJA, 1986, VARIOUS
- TREASURE ISLAND 1987, C64, 1987
- AMAUROTE, 1987, VARIOUS
- KIKSTART II, 1987, VARIOUS
- THE CURSE OF SHERWOOD, 1987, VARIOUS
- RAD RAMP RACER, 1990, VARIOUS
- JUDGE DREDD, 1991, VARIOUS



Released: 2005
Format: Xbox, PlayStation 2
Publisher: THQ
Key Staff: Brad Welch (director and designer), Andrew Cooper (coder, project lead), Dan Teasdale (designer), Derek Proud (producer, THQ), Tom Abernathy (writer), Adam Iarossi (lead programmer), Fiona Francois (lead artist), Lachlan Creagh (animation)

**From blasting aliens in Space Invaders, to repelling slobbering xenomorphs from the planet, humans have had it their own way for too long. Join games™ as we pick up our zap-o-matic with the former Pandemic team and prepare to take one giant step on mankind…**

**1959, A SMALL FARM OUTSIDE THE AMERICAN MID-WEST TOWN OF ROCKWELL.** A farmer lazily tills his land and cows munch grass in the warm summer glow. The only noise is the faint hum of a nearby highway and the slow turn of the farm's creaking wind pump. An idyllic setting for a farming simulator, you might think, or some kind of narrative adventure. The minds at Pandemic had a far more sinister and playful concept in mind.

*Destroy All Humans!'* developer, Pandemic Studios, was formed in 1998 with backing from Activision, and based in Los Angeles. The origins of the studio had begun even earlier, specifically on the sci-fi RTS, *Dark Reign*. "My first actual job making a game was *Dark Reign*," begins Brad Welch, *Destroy All Humans!'* director and in charge of the overall vision, style, mechanics and story of the comedy sci-fi game. *Dark Reign*, an underrated strategy title, was produced by Activision and Australian developer Auran. "When that was completed, a bunch of the programmers went to work for Activision. I passed on an offer to go to LA, but stayed in touch, and years later when Pandemic split from Activision, a few of those guys went on with Pandemic." With pressure from these coders to return home coupled with a favourable exchange rate, an antipodean studio was soon on the cards. "I think I was the first hire there," recalls Welch, "although I was still on the art team at that point." First up for the fledgling studio was *Army Men RTS*, before the team turned to pitching its next project.

**DOING A FUNNY ABDUCTION GAME COULD ACTUALLY BE A LAUGH**
**BRAD WELCH**

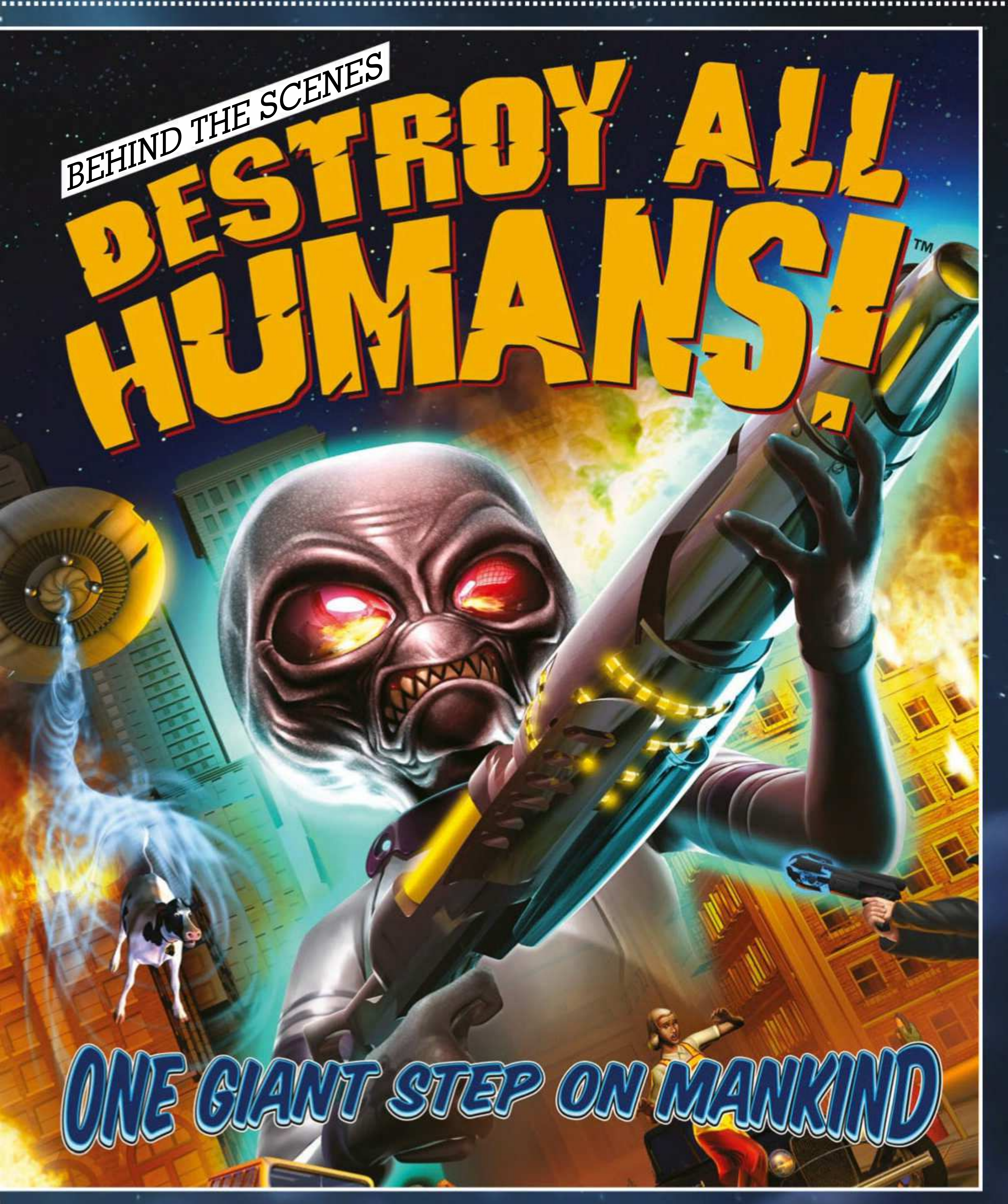
The story is taken up by designer Dan Teasdale. Like Welch, Teasdale had been tempted away from Auran to the new Pandemic satellite studio. "After *Army Men RTS* we worked on some cancelled titles including an Xbox real-time party game called *Oddballs*, and a bunch of pitches for various gaming and movie IPs that were popular at the time. This rolled right into *Destroy All Humans!* as our first new IP."

The team, including Teasdale, Welch, manager Brendan Andrews and lead designer Matt Harding, discussed potential new game ideas via email, which Teasdale, miraculously, still has to this day. The thread began with a succinct proposal from designer Matt Harding. "Alright: fly around in a UFO sucking rednecks and cattle onto your ship. Anyone? Anyone?" Despite Harding's half-hearted pitch, the idea caught on. "Doing a funny abduction game could actually be a laugh," replied Welch, as the idea expanded with each email reply. Crucially, studio head Andrews was also excited at the prospect of a Fifties-themed satirical game. "I think the hook is *very* strong, and the stories are already part of culture. You could call it *Conspirator* if you were the baddie, or *Conspiracy* if you were the goodie." The name of the game would became the subject of much discussion at Pandemic as the idea progressed. Says Teasdale, "It came to Matt one day as he was walking home. It was an epiphany for him, he texted it to Andy [Cooper, project lead] who replied by saying something along the lines of 'Perfect. Done.' That was the easy part!"

Matt Harding honed the pitch as Welch began to determine the layout and style of the game, with a brace of concept artists busy creating pieces to actualise the vision. "The pitch was actually pretty well received and it was a great title," says Welch. "We had a few publishers interested, but we went with THQ. I don't remember the business details, but they had a local studio in Brisbane, so that might have been a factor." Assigned to *Destroy All Humans!* by the publisher was producer Derek Proud. Another native Australian, Proud had been working on Electronic Arts' Harry Potter franchise before the opportunity to move back to his home country tempted him to THQ. "The first thing I thought was that we need to change the name!" he exclaims, before conceding that it certainly succeeded in grabbing attention. "The initial pitch was 'Grand Theft Human', which after time we felt focused too much on the abduction mechanic. So internally, our tag for the game became 'Be The Alien'". With Pandemic and THQ already in discussion to create team combat game



Crypto beams down from his saucer, ready for action.


BEHIND THE SCENES
DESTROY ALL HUMANS!™
ONE GIANT STEP ON MANKIND



WHAT THEY SAID...

Everything from the dialogue to the wacky parody-style of the art works incredibly well at creating an even more uptight, alternate Fifties universe

**OXM, 2005**

*Full Spectrum Warrior*, the extension of the relationship was a logical one.

*Destroy All Humans!*' gameplay was set as open-world from the very start, with a central hub high above the planet in Crypto's mothership saucer. Recalls Welch, "Pandemic had sort of moved that way, and the very first level ideas were very sandbox along the lines of, here's a small town, here's ten different ways to destroy all the humans in the area, here's a UFO and here's a ray gun – GO FOR IT!" With its Fifties mid-west America setting, the game was firmly entrenched in the culture of the time. "While *Mars Attacks!* and movies such as *Plan 9 From Outer Space* were a big influence," remembers Teasdale, "a bigger pull was the era itself, and making the locations and way the people acted. Stylistically, we ended up using Bernard Hermann's scores in movies such as *Vertigo* and *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, and even used some of it in our first E3 demo."

Development began on Xbox and PlayStation 2 using a modified version of Pandemic's *Dark Reign 2* engine. "Our core group was very reluctant to spend huge amounts of time completely replacing tech," remembers Welch. "We much preferred to try and shape existing tech to do what the game needed." Welch himself became defacto director, a role which encompassed many different duties. "One day I could be playing a mission and providing feedback," he says. "Or editing a script, listening to voice auditions, checking out concept art, meeting with THQ or reviewing a build with our bosses at Pandemic LA." Ultimately, Welch remained responsible for what the player experienced, while keeping half an eye on the future development of the game, which included that most difficult of concepts: humour. Fortunately, support for the light-hearted nature of the game came from the top at publisher THQ. Says Proud, "We felt the game's humour was what set us apart from the pack, but it's not an easy thing to do as everyone has a different sense of what is funny. It's a credit to the team, especially the writers, that the game still saw wide success, but it should be noted that my boss, Steve Dauterman, was a major supporter as he had come from LucasArts, and knew first-hand how games like *Monkey Island* and *Day Of The Tentacle* could work with comedy."

**MARS ATTACKS! AND MOVIES SUCH AS PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE WERE A BIG INFLUENCE**
DAN TEASDALE

*Destroy All Humans!* is the story Cryptosporidium-137, brother of 136, his predecessor on an earlier failed mission to Earth. Crypto is a proud member of the Furons, a race

All the fun of the fair with Cryptosporidium-137!

of small yet highly intelligent creatures that is under threat of extinction. Years of nuclear warfare has taken its toll on the Furons; their genes have mutated and their bloodline corrupted, resulting in a rather unfortunate issue, um, downstairs. Unable to reproduce naturally, the Furons have relied upon their cloning technology in order to survive. However, with this process becoming increasingly unstable, another plan is needed if Crypto and his kind are to continue their reign of terror over the galaxy. And that's where mankind comes in as, thanks to chance visit to Earth by a Furon ship thousands of years ago, every human being alive contains a strand of Furon DNA deep within their genetic code. Crypto's rather gruesome mission is to extract as many human brain stems as possible in order to refine their cloning program and safely continue to propagate the Furon race.

As befits the advanced nature of Crypto's species, he has a range of exotic technology at his disposal, in addition to vastly superior mental powers. The cortex scan enables him to read the mind of any person (or cows, whom he amusingly mistakes as Earth's dominant species early in the game). Psychokinesis is the ability to pick up objects with his mind and hurl them through the air, while Crypto's mission requires the squelchy brain extraction power, which does exactly as the name evidently suggests. Weaponry ranges from the electrical zap-o-matic, to the disintegrator ray (turns victims into neat little piles of ash), death ray and – of course! – the anal probe. "That's a part of alien lore, and it would have looked out of place if we didn't do it!" laughs Proud. "But it was a step too far



Crypto can read the minds of primitive humans.


Crypto sports a useful jet pack.

# THE CRYPTOSAURUS

## DESTROY ALL HUMANS! FACT FILE

- PC and N64 versions were considered but dropped at an early planning stage.
- Tom Abernathy was an off-site writer, before joining Pandemic as Destroy All Humans! wrapped. He was responsible for much of the game's humour.
- Pandemic began development on the game with around 15 staff, ending with almost 40.
- Apart from the Fifties setting, influences on the game included: The X-Files, Twilight Zone, Invaders From Mars, Mars Attacks! and well-known conspiracies such as Area 51 and the Kennedy assassination.
- The game featured three different viewpoints: Crypto on foot, Crypto flying with the aid of a jet pack and Crypto piloting his flying saucer. Missions usually required a combination of these in order to succeed.
- The game's villains, secret organisation The Majestic, is clearly inspired by the Men In Black.
- Pandemic also pitched a high school simulator called Marshall High at the same time as Destroy All Humans!. It never saw the light of day.
- The team developed a series of stories (such as chemical leak or communist agents) to cover up Crypto's antics.
- As crunch day loomed, Pandemic flew over staff from its LA office to assist on Destroy All Humans!. They had been working on another open-world game, Mercenaries.
- There were several meetings with FOX TV for a proposed television show based around Destroy All Humans!. The idea fizzled out.
- Development began late 2002 until May 2005.
- It's estimated the game shifted 1.6-1.7 million units worldwide.
- In the game's original ending, Crypto arrives at the White House and forces the president to sign surrender documents. However, as he is about to do so, a second alien race known as the Blisk arrives, causing a 'cataclysmically awkward moment'.






# THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL HIGHWAY

Brad Welch remembers a spontaneous research trip

**"IN 2004, myself and Matt [Harding] were in LA for E3, so we did a little road trip to Vegas for the weekend. Given our *Destroy All Humans!* experience, a jaunt up to Area 51 had to be on the cards. Anyway, we got up there late, just after dark at Rachel, Nevada. After visiting the Little A'le'Inn and talking to some locals, we headed back up the extra-terrestrial highway. We had a GPS in the car, and kept seeing these dirt roads heading into Area 51, which was a big blank space with no fences or anything.**




**"So, after a bit of debate, we got up the courage to go in. It was pitch black, and the dirt tracks were all well-manicured. We passed a dead end with a fenced-off property covered in wire fence and keep out signs, but kept going deeper. We eventually got to a spot with a sign on each side of the road: 'Nellis Range. Keep out. Shoot to kill. No photography.' Naturally, we got out and took photos of the signs. Then, as we were about to leave, Matt said, 'what if we drive like a few yards past the sign?' What could happen? So we slowly moved forwards, and suddenly two headlights turn on up on some dark hill.**

**"We freaked, got the hell out of there and didn't look back. Later, I checked out an Area 51 guide book, and sure enough there are sentries everywhere, they hire ex-soldiers to patrol the area and chase off idiots like us if you keep going. So we were dumb Area 51 tourists like anyone else, and they were probably laughing their asses off up in that vehicle!"**

for the Japanese version of the game. In addition to changing the brains to crystals that popped out of people's heads, we had to make some scripting and content changes that led it to be not so much about the butt." In terms of Crypto's arsenal, Proud also recalls an early challenge surrounding a weapon that was eventually dropped because of its complexity. "We had a brain-controlling sniper rifle. You could zoom in on someone, fire a brain bug into them and take them over. We had several missions designed to take advantage of this." While an undeniably cool concept, the team struggled to implement the sniper rifle, and in the end it was abandoned for not dovetailing with the core idea of the game. "It didn't really fit in with the kind of alien our main character was," explains Proud. "[Crypto] didn't really need to snipe from afar; he was mentally, technologically and genetically superior to humans, so had no reason to fear them, or keep his distance." Another omission was space beasts, huge alien monsters Crypto could summon that would rampage throughout the environments. Ambitious both visually and in terms of gameplay, the idea was also ultimately dropped, much to the chagrin of Pandemic's excited artists. "That was one of the big things that hit the cutting room floor," recalls Teasdale. "Originally, the gameplay flow was more like *Pikmin*, you'd abduct people and scare them to feeding the beasts. When we made the shift from UFO to alien-focused gameplay, that was dropped, but I think it would have been amazing!"



In terms of its narrative tone and structure, the original pitch to *Destroy All Humans!* informed much of its development, as Dan Welch explains. "In the pitch, classic alien scenarios and locations were shown or suggested. We planned the locations before we had the plot nailed down, so it was more like the tourist's guide to the most iconic b-movie locations." Out of this came the secluded tranquil farm, the backwater mid-western town and a secret desert location known as Area 42. "Then, as we pushed into more of a narrative, we focused on the characters more than the story. We wanted the simple farmers, the country town folks and the angry general, all the way up to the White House." The game's villains came in the form of various military factions, and the classic mysterious G-men, smart-suited agents deployed by the government to take down Crypto and his allies.

Building *Destroy All Humans!'* levels proved challenging for the team, and was inspired in part by Naughty Dog's Jak And Daxter games. "One neat example," reveals Teasdale, "was that it would bake out what a chunk of the console's memory should look like on frame one of a level, then just stream that entire chunk into memory on level load." The result was super-quick loading times where the CPU even hung idle for a second or two as the game's loading cards and animations finished. Like Welch, Teasdale had a varied role in development, working on its levels, interface, scripting and editing. "I also loved building tiny tools and stuff. I even built a web front end that let you examine and explore the game as it was running on the console hardware. Not hugely useful, but it was neat to make and cool to show off!"

Being the early-mid Noughties, open-world games were still expanding, and *Destroy All Humans!'* gameplay caused plenty of developmental challenges, especially considering it was Pandemic's first experience with the genre. Remembers Welch, "I would say a lot of the issues were from open world games just being hard, and this was our first one. It was also our first game with Havok


Crypto creates havoc at Turnipseed farm.

## > A GAMING EVOLUTION

Grand Theft Auto III > Destroy All Humans! > Crackdown



Rockstar set up the template for all other action games to follow if they wanted to create a 3D sandbox shooter experience.



*Crackdown* followed in the sci-fi genre direction of *Destroy All Humans!*, albeit a little more grounded.



physics." From the very first level, Crypto is able to pick up and toss around unwitting victims. "Oh yeah," continues Welch. "Ragdoll physics on quadruped cows with udders? That was a tricky one! Everything had to work at a detailed ground level, and also a wider view from the UFO, and then also a middle range with the jetpack. We wanted everything to feel seamless, and it all put lots of constraints on the artists in particular." As a result of these complexities, development on *Destroy All Humans!* inevitably overran, by over six months. "We crunched all the way to the end for our 'final' release date," shudders Teasdale, "to the point where we intentionally tried to fail our PS2 certification in order to buy another week." Unfortunately for the team, THQ managed to persuade Sony to pass the game, despite the deliberate, albeit minor, bug. "If you had to toggle the widescreen option twice on PS2, I apologise!" laments Teasdale.

With the game approaching completion, THQ focused on its marketing campaign and how the game would be pitched to the public. Recalls Derek Proud, "I remember there was a lot of discussion on the cover, with Crypto looming above the fleeing humans and cows with an evil grimace." The talks were concerned chiefly on whether the game's star looked too evil or angry, and whether the cover adequately conveyed its humour. "We also brought in a consultancy group, a team of ex-reviewers, who advised us on the best way to pitch and market the game. In the end though, I think the idea was just very different to most other games in the marketplace, and that was our biggest selling tool." Upon release, *Destroy All Humans!* notched impressive reviews and worldwide sales, cementing the start of a new franchise for its publishers. While he admits to never being completely satisfied with any game he works on, Welch is proud of the effort put in by the Pandemic team. "Gameplay-wise it's OK, but through a mix of my greenness as a director and just spreading ourselves too thin, it doesn't have the mechanical depth I would have liked to have achieved. In retrospect, we probably should have locked down some of the mechanics earlier so we could focus on other parts of the game more." One of the few criticisms from the press was the game's short length, something that would be addressed in its sequel. Concludes Proud, "At the end of the game we had a huge amount of material left over, and we could have kept working and adding stuff for another year. But as is always the case, in those last six months you have to put things aside and say 'let's do that in the sequel'." Fortunately, just over a year later, fans would get the chance to step into Furon shoes once more, this time taking on the dastardly Russian KGB.

Almost 13 years after released, *Destroy All Humans!* remains an entertaining and amusing romp, a testament to Pandemic, and THQ's dedication and enthusiasm. "We had management issues, relationships strained and crumbled, and in one case we even lost a designer because the strain induced a back injury," remembers Teasdale. "But through all of that, and even when we doubted what the reception to the game would be like, I don't think anyone ever stopped being proud of the work we were doing, or what we were making."



**RAGDOLL PHYSICS ON QUADRUPED COWS WITH UDDERS? THAT WAS A TRICKY ONE**
**BRAD WELCH**




**WHAT THEY SAID...**

Ultimately, what makes Destroy All Humans! work isn't its gameplay. Rather, it's everything else that goes around it. The comedy is frequent and consistent, and from a purely presentational standpoint, this game does its concept extremely proud

**Gamespot, 2005**

## CODING BACK THE YEARS

"I fell madly in love with the Spectrum. It was wonderful and it felt so advanced. Yet my BASIC computer skills were somewhat lacking: an early review of *Conflict* was very complimentary but it said it had been programmed by an aardvark. Even so, that review allowed me to take a punt and see the buyer at WH Smith. They ordered 1,200 units and, given John and I were making ten copies a weekend at a push, I went away to discover how to make them pretty darned quickly. It was a seat-of-the-pants, what-comes-next, how-do-we-do-this and where's-the-money-coming-from business."



# INTERVIEW DAVID MARTIN

Former chemistry teacher David Martin experimented with the videogames industry in the early 1980s and remained a part of it for three decades

## SELECT GAMEOGRAPHY



**Zoids: The Battle Begins [1985]**
Founder, Martech Games



**Zool [1992]**
Marketing Director, Gremlin Interactive



**David Beckham Soccer [2007]**
Licensing Director, Rage

**WHEN DID YOU first set eyes on a computer?**

It was at university in the 1970s – they were huge things that you had to book seconds on and then spend days punching holes in cards. Horrible. But when I became head of chemistry in a comprehensive school in Somerset a few years later, I heard that the local authority would hire out a computer to teachers, so I used some of my test tube budget to get a Research Machines 380Z in for a week. It was delivered on a trolley with a keyboard, the box, and a monitor displaying blocky graphics. I couldn't believe it. That was a big thing back then.

**When did you start gaming?**

The head of maths gave me a heads-up on early programming and I tried to make a game on neutralising acids with alkalis. I got bored very quickly so I experimented with writing a game. I had always loved games since a young age, so it was too good an opportunity to miss. *Sub Sink* featured a U-boat jerking across the screen, above it your sub destroyer. You had to work out when to drop the charge based on speed and depth – hit the target and it exploded into blocks! The kids at the school loved it.

**Were you looking at the educational potential of computers?**

In the early 1980s, the BBC Model B arrived and it was pitched squarely at the education market. It was a true personal computer and, joy of joys, it had colour graphics. I was now head of department in a new school so I ordered one. It was great, but this time it was difficult to get time alone with the machine because everyone wanted a go! Luckily, I then came across a Sinclair ZX81 and despite being an impoverished teacher with two small children, I bought one, together with the cheapest TV I could find, a huge black-and-white Bush. The ZX81 only had 1K RAM so as soon as I could I bought the wobbly 16K RAM pack. My very own home computer to play with. It was amazing.

**You were also a board game designer at that time: what kind of board games did you design?**

I'd always made up board games as a kid, based on things like motorsport, world wars, horse racing and treasure hunts which I played with family and friends. I think I discovered my imagination making and playing these games, disappearing into these imaginary worlds and loving the challenge of creating something that people would enjoy.

**WE'D SPEND WEEKENDS MAKING BOARDS, CUTTING OUT COUNTERS, DUPLICATING CASSETTE TAPES ONE AT A TIME**

**Did it feel natural to move from board games to computer games?**

Very natural. For me, the ZX81 was what I'd been waiting for all my life and I was buzzing with ideas. Board games use dice so it struck me there was a great opportunity to use a PC to generate far more complex outcomes than one to six. I started working on a game called *Conflict*, which had a board and pieces but the gameplay was integrated with a computer program that influenced events and outcomes. Later, when the board game



element was eventually dropped, the games were very different. It was much more about the experience and the immediacy than pausing in silence to consider what might be the best thing to do. You had to act fast or events overtook you. But I guess elements of strategy and objective can be common. The most important thing for both is, would you play it again?

**When did you decide to start selling your games?**

I tried *Conflict* out on friends and it went down really well so I thought I was on to something. I started making small quantities at home with the help of a local printer and then selling them into local shops. It was a very small business, but fun. My brother-in-law John Barry agreed to help over a few pints, so we'd spend weekends making boards, cutting out counters, duplicating cassette tapes one at a time, and putting it all into a polythene bag with a card header. It drove us nuts. Why I developed a game with over 100 counters, I don't know!

**How did the company – Martech Games – evolve?**

Well, we made another computer-moderated board game called *Galaxy Conflict* but it was clear the big market was for standalone games. Things were happening quickly with new publishers, games, magazines, distributors and retailers and "100% machine code" was the buzz term. That was a mystery to me so we put some ads in some mags asking for games and programmers and it didn't take long for them to start turning up. We also found an investor, a local export company, which saw potential for overseas sales, so a limited company was set up and funding arrived. At first we took on the distribution for Durell Software, which produced *Harrier Attack* and *Scuba Dive*. For Martech, I was looking for games that had an angle, a bit quirky, something that could create a buzz.

**What did you choose?**

I'd seen this guy called Eddie Kidd doing crazy jumps on a motorbike and saw an idea for a game with great promotional opportunities. I did a deal with his manager and set a small team of three to create *Eddie Kidd's Jump Challenge* on Spectrum, BBC B/ Electron and the new Commodore 64. Both that and the Durell games sold really well and helped establish our new company and the Martech brand.

**Did you directly hire programmers for in-house work?**

In the early days, all our development was freelance and done from home. It was a true cottage industry and there was no shortage of talent. The offices (three rooms above John's practice, Barry & Co, in Pevensey Bay) were becoming quite business-like. We bought our first business computer, an Apple, and floppy disks started to litter the desk. I took on two admin support staff as we grew and someone to pack and ship the games, but to be honest, for the business we were beginning to develop, we were woefully understaffed.

**IT FELT LIKE THE WORLD WAS CAVING IN WHEN BOTH STUDIOS AND MARTECH HAD TO BE CLOSED**

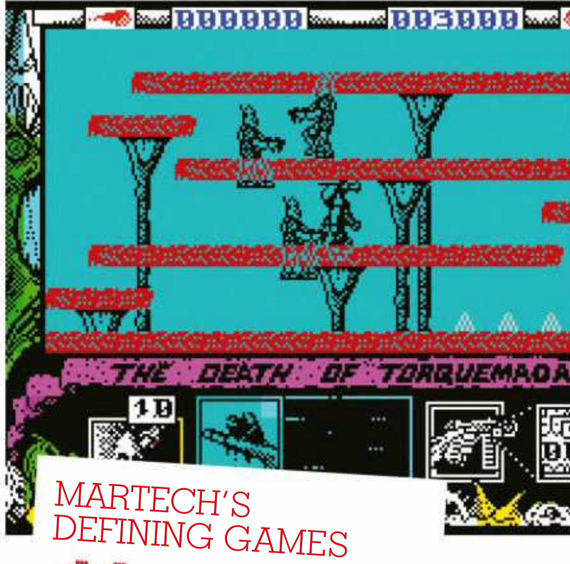
**What kind of turnover did you have?**

As I recall, we hit £250,000-plus in a year quite quickly and went on to £500,000 quickly after that. The new Martech Games like *Brian Jack's Superstar Challenge* and *Geoff Capes Strongman* sold really well, as did Durell's *Combat Lynx*, the last game we handled for them.

**Licensed games were unusual for the time: was this something you saw as important?**

It just struck me early on, before I actually saw any games with a license, that tying a game in with something popular would create lots of promotional opportunities that would not be there otherwise. We could have released *Superstar Challenge* without Brian Jacks and tried to create coverage on the back of just the game, but having Brian involved gave us his story and profile, a catalogue of photos, interviews with mags, appearances at the big games



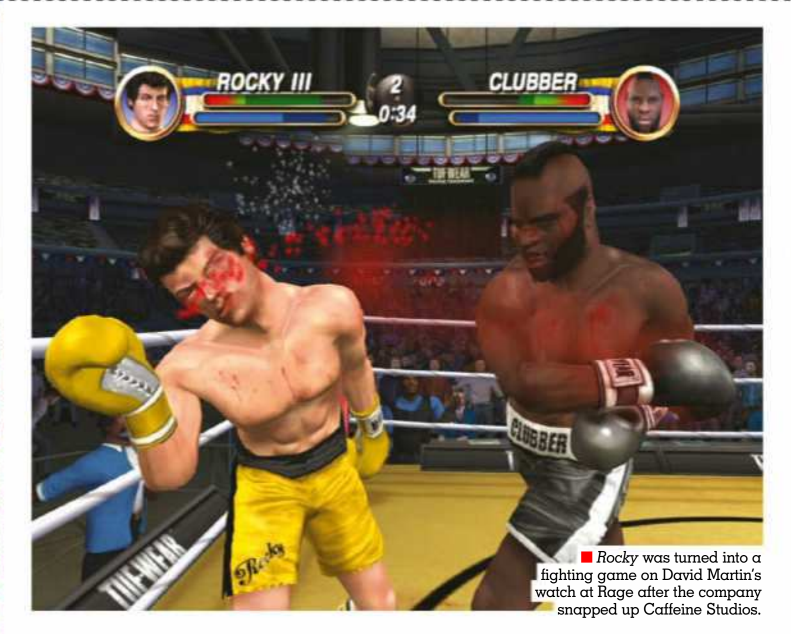




## MARTECH'S DEFINING GAMES

"The high-profile license games were important for Martech but we also created some really interesting non-licensed titles, like *Catch 23* (an early vector graphic game that came so close to being great), *Mega-Apocalypse* (still one of the best ever shoot 'em ups), and *REX* (the best-ever Spectrum game in my opinion). The defining games were *Zoids*, *Tarzan*, the sports games with Eddie, Brian, Geoff and later Nigel Mansell, even Sam Fox. Of them all, I'd say *Zoids* was the one that made the biggest splash."




David Martin signed David Beckham on behalf of Rage and the result was *David Beckham Soccer* for the PSOne, PS2, Xbox, GBA and Game Boy Color.



■ *Rocky* was turned into a fighting game on David Martin's watch at Rage after the company snapped up Caffeine Studios.

■ As Gremlin's marketing director, David Martin was responsible for promoting a host of top titles such as 1992's *Space Crusade*.




exhibitions that were starting to happen, even getting him to play the game on TV. We could generate pages of news, previews, competitions, that would have been far harder to get otherwise. When you put the cost of the license (in those days) against the coverage gained, it was a no-brainer. Of course, the game still had to be good as bad reviews could still kill it, but thankfully that was usually (though not always) the case.

**Why did you establish Emerald Software?**
We'd reached a point where we knew we needed in-house development and Emerald, together with a second studio in Brighton, was intended to grow to provide all our content going forwards. The plan was to establish Emerald by taking on some additional development work for other publishers. Mike Dixon, who we brought in to run it, had very good contacts with UK and US based publishers and we quickly secured some contracts for games like *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker* and *The Running Man*. It was an ambitious move to set up two studios, in fact over-ambitious and a huge mistake, but hindsight is a wonderful thing.

**Why was this HQed in Ireland?**
There were some great Government grants available in Ireland for tech start-ups, so John and I set up a series of meetings with the Industrial Development Authority in Dublin and secured a £250,000 grant for the first year to set up a games studio. We also realised there was a lot of programming and graphic talent coming out of the colleges in Ireland looking for work. It seemed a perfect opportunity.

**What happened to Emerald?**
We tried to grow Emerald too fast and, although there was a lot of talent, the team was short on experience. Deadlines started to slip, cash flow became tight, and things started to go wrong. It became firefighting, which is not an easy thing to do when you are a flight away. I was out and back from Luton to Waterford pretty much every week but it kept going downhill and, as a double blow, the loss of focus on Martech also caused problems. It felt like the world was caving in when both studios and Martech had to be closed.

**You moved to Gremlin Graphics. Was it very different working for someone else?**
Totally. I'd had eight years running my own set up so it took some adjustment. Gremlin's founder Ian Stewart had been out to Emerald to look at us doing some Nintendo development. He was a good, smart guy and when things fell apart he saw an opportunity to rescue something from the ashes. I was given a freelance role to scout for license opportunities for Gremlin, something I had a lot of experience of. I brought in a number of properties including HeroQuest, Team Suzuki, Toyota Celica GT and of course the Lotus rights for a series of games. Gremlin was growing fast and eventually Ian offered me a full-time role as marketing director which I did for about three years.

**Why did you leave and set up Caffeine Studios?**
I left to set up an independent agency sourcing licenses, attaching the development, and then cutting deals with publishers but it was tougher than I had thought it would be. During this process, I came across a small team in Huddersfield developing football games and I decided to get involved and help them grow. We published a successful game, *Football World Manager*, through Ubisoft, and we also started to develop a highly innovative mass-multiplayer football management game called *The Internet Football Club*. We then got approached by Rage to acquire the whole studio. I became Rage's group licensing director and they were about to make the transition from development studio to publisher.

**Two of your successes with Rage were getting the games publishing rights for David Beckham and the Rocky movie franchise. Did you meet Beckham and Sly?**
I did. David was a nice guy and, for Rocky – to my children's even greater amazement, I met Mr T! Initially things looked great but Rage's share price tumbled fast. In the end not being a board director and being able to see under the bonnet became too much and I resigned. About a year later, the company went under which was a real shame.

**What did you do next?**
After Rage I set-up a small development studio in Sheffield called Big Kids to focus on games development for handheld devices. Initially we focused on handheld games consoles but I also had an eye on the mobile phone market. We got down the road with some opportunities with leading cartoon characters, including Mr Bean, but couldn't convert anything. It was so frustrating. We switched development back to PC with a license I secured for *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* spaghetti movie and created a prototype, but we were really not geared up for such a big project and in the end I decided to close the studio.

**But then you left gaming. Why was that?**
I fell out of love with the videogames industry. The excitement and innovation of the early years had been replaced by big business and games development with huge teams that took years. That didn't appeal to me so I left to pursue other things. But I have great memories of my time in the industry.

System Shock 2 is a standalone sequel to the 1994 original. A sequel was never anticipated due to developer Looking Glass losing money on the project after just moderate success on the shelves.

GAME CHANGERS

# SYSTEM SHOCK 2

**Developer:** Irrational Games, Looking Glass Studios **Publisher:** EA **Released:** 11 August 1999 **System:** PC

Remembering the legendary immersive sim that would kickstart a new generation of narrative-focused and atmospheric first-person shooters

GENERALLY SPEAKING, THERE are two kinds of 'Game Changer' in the videogame industry. There are those that are widely considered to be instant classics, their impact immediately reverberating across the landscape of game creation – the *Ocarina Of Times* and *Super Mario 64*s of this world. And then there are the rare few that are considered to be so ahead of their time that their true impact and influence can only be gauged with some amount of distance and reflection. *System Shock 2* is unequivocally part of the latter camp.

*System Shock 2* heralded a new dawn for the first-person shooter at a time where *DOOM* and its kin still reigned supreme – though many wouldn't completely appreciate its contribution to the genre for another eight years, until the release of spiritual successor *BioShock*. Designed in partnership between Looking Glass Studios, the stalwarts of the immersive sim genre, and Irrational Games, a new studio formed by Looking Glass alumni Ken Levine, Jonathan Chey and Robert Fermier, the 1999 release would provide further proof that the shooter genre had more to offer than mere dopamine thrills. It quickly established that consistent thematic tone, evocative storytelling and a tempered pacing were just as important to the fledging genre as gun handling, weapon variety and a morally bankrupt outlook and approach to encouraging interactive violence.

**SYSTEM SHOCK 2 HERALDED A NEW DAWN FOR THE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER AT A TIME WHERE DOOM AND ITS KIN STILL REIGNED SUPREME**

Of course, *System Shock 2* excelled in all of those departments, but it was what the game had at its heart that elevated its core concept into something

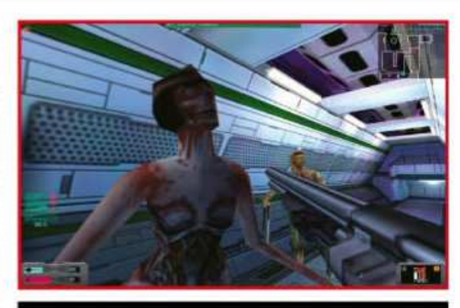
## SCARIEST ENEMIES

CELEBRATING THE FOES THAT MADE YOU CONSIDER SHUTTING THE GAME OFF ENTIRELY



### THE HYBRIDS

★ A mutated monster born from having an annelid Grub take control of its host's central nervous system. These humans aren't in control of their actions, but they sure are conscious of them, with many of them begging the player to kill them and end their cycle of pain and misery.



### CYBORG MIDWIFE

★ The cyborgs encountered on the space station are some of SHODAN's finest work. Repurposed humans under the control of The Many – an illusive force of terror throughout the game. The Cyborg Midwife incubates Grub Eggs, protecting them by any means necessary.



### SHODAN

★ The ever-present and unhinged artificial intelligence that serves as the central antagonist, SHODAN is one of the greatest villains to ever appear in a videogame. Leveraging manipulation and subterfuge, SHODAN is quickly able to gain the player's trust, and twist it accordingly.

the industry had never seen before. *System Shock 2* is a hybrid first-person shooter that integrated deep RPG systems alongside elements of the survival-horror genre, funnelling all of this through an unforgettable sci-fi locale practically dripping with atmosphere – one spearheaded by a malevolent artificial threat that would go on to become one of gaming's most celebrated villains.

It's a game experience rooted in fear. Within its opening hours, *System Shock 2* establishes that you are isolated from a wider world; that you are unequipped and unprepared to face the challenges that lie ahead of you. What those challenges are, exactly, is never made explicitly clear; it is signalled through splatter across the walls in shades of dark red, uncovered through careful examination of the collapsing environments and foretold through chilling audio logs scattered among the death and decay.

The sense of tension pervading throughout the derelict Citadel station is immediately palpable; it's one of *System Shock 2*'s greatest assets. You feel it crawling up your spine as you pick through corpses, desperately searching for ammunition, health packs, psionic hypos and any other such items or resources that might improve your chances of survival in this twisted sci-fi hellscape. You feel it tingling through your fingers with every cautious move of the mouse or click of a key, the weighted movement system making every action feel purposeful and deliberate, as if it truly could be your last.

The interlacing RPG systems found in *System Shock 2* can be traced back to *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*. In fact, Junction Point – as the game was known internally through the earliest parts of its 18-month development cycle – was conceived as a spiritual successor of sorts to *Ultima Underworld*, albeit one forgoing the fantasy setting for that of science-fiction. At its core, however, the same design philosophy ran deep. That of a persistent world that existed outside of the player's immediate presence; character customisation that set you on a winding path, with opportunities to upgrade your abilities vastly shifting the direction of the game experience around your own play-style preferences. *System Shock 2* became an open-ended game experience that was imbued with horror and defined by opportunity, striking a shifting balance between fragility and power as you slowly get to grips with your limitations in a world that so often feels as if it has none of its own to be exploited.

It's actually surprising that any of this came together as well as it did. Irrational Games made use of Looking Glass Studio's proprietary Dark Engine as the foundation for *System Shock 2*. While this engine would later be used to create pioneering stealth game *Thief: The Dark Project* a year later, it was unfinished through much of *System Shock*'s development. The game was riddled with bugs, with the team having to spend a sizable amount of time and resources fixing basic problems with the technology – though it also proved flexible enough to allow Irrational to push its core concept and design philosophy further than anybody thought possible, not to mention quickly incorporate requested changes to both story and gameplay by incoming-publisher EA as it took Junction Point on and transformed it from a new IP into a standalone sequel to 1994's *System Shock*.

*System Shock 2* took an open-ended game design, incredibly tight FPS mechanics and deep RPG systems and pushed them together to create something unique and indifferent to the movements being made elsewhere in the industry. A thought-provoking and tempered narrative interlaced expertly with overt themes of horror, fear and isolation to materialise a game experience that felt truly inescapable. Underappreciated by the masses to this very day, the influence of *System Shock 2* is far reaching – hidden away in its code are lessons still yet to be taught to would-be game makers, facets of its design still not fully grasped by those willing for a way to turn the FPS genre on its head and carve out new and interesting ways to interact with a world and story with a wrench glued to your right hand.

### KEY FACTS

- While Ken Levine was known for his work on concepting and writing *Thief: The Dark Project*, it would be *System Shock 2* where he would flex his creative muscles as the design lead. Levine would later go on to direct *BioShock*, seen by many as a spiritual successor to *System Shock 2*.

- *System Shock 2* began its life as a brand-new IP, but it had trouble attracting publisher support. EA would eventually step in, attaching the *System Shock* IP, helping to finance the game – which had a notoriously large budget – and pushing for changes that would make it stand out further from the litany of *DOOM*-style corridor shooters that were common at the time.

GAME CHANGERS

# EIGHT OF THE BEST SPIRITUAL ORIGINATORS

THE RETRO FRANCHISES THAT MADE SUCH A SPLASH THAT THEIR LEGACY WAS CONTINUED IN ALL BUT NAME




## SYSTEM SHOCK 2

*System Shock 2* may never have obtained the success it so clearly deserved back in '99, but the game's creative lead, Ken Levine, took steps to ensure that its legacy was enshrined in the hearts and minds of players the world over. *System Shock 2*'s hybrid FPS-RPG design, the environmental storytelling it helped pioneer, the manipulative narrative and open-ended world design would all serve as a backbone for Irrational Games' *BioShock*.



## THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT

Looking Glass Studios' *Thief: The Dark Project*'s influence spread across the industry. Its innovative stealth mechanics – relying on visual and audio cues to aid in navigation and circumventing detection – were relatively unprecedented. While *Hitman*, *Splinter Cell* and *Tenchu* would all honour the game's legacy, it was *Dishonored* that would pick up the mantle, delivering a game that felt like it was made in earnest – a game elevated by its devotion to *Thief*'s achievements, rather than encumbered by them.




## WASTELAND

It's funny how things work out sometimes. Back in the early Nineties developer Interplay lost the IP rights of *Wasteland* to EA; the poor reception of sort-of-sequel *Fountain Of Dreams*, not to mention the core team running off to work on the ill-fated *Meantime*, certainly didn't help things along. And so Interplay set about on its next endeavour, a *Wasteland* game in all but name, *Fallout*. In many ways *Fallout* is the perfect spiritual successor, offering homage while still striking out in a new and exciting direction.



## GOLDENEYE 007

Where to begin with *Goldeneye 007*? Rare's famed FPS proved that there was life in the console shooter yet, and its influence has spread far and wide throughout the industry. Still, it's funny to think that we wouldn't have received *Perfect Dark* had Rare not have been outbid for the IP rights to *Tomorrow Never Dies* (that would be the influence of EA again). And so Rare ran wild with its new-found freedom, delivering a spy-themed FPS that, arguably, surpasses its famed predecessor.



## PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

Widely considered to be one of, if not *the* greatest RPG of all time, *Planescape: Torment* should have had a long and healthy cycle of releases – the game world offered bountiful opportunity for expansion thanks to its rich history and interesting characters. Still, it was not to be; we would have to wait a decade to return to Numenera. While inXile was unable to prise the licence away from Wizards Of The Coast, we would eventually receive *Torment: Tides Of Numenera*, a spiritual successor to the famed RPG.



## HARVEST MOON

*Harvest Moon* is a game that sought to make chores fun, pushing players to stick to regimented routines of watering crops, planting seeds and learning to love thy neighbours. It should have been laborious, but instead it was captivating – what can we say, we are but creatures of habit. As the quality of the franchise declined over the years, with many of the core team splintering off to work on *Story Of Seasons*, a true spiritual successor finally emerged in the form of *Stardew Valley*, and we can never go back.



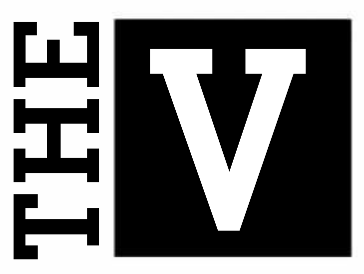
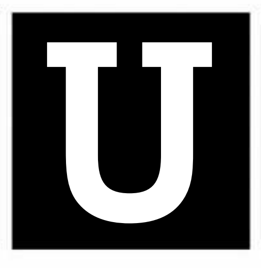
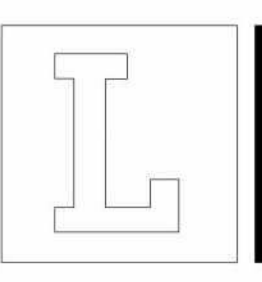
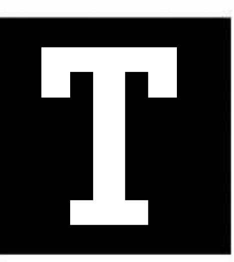
## SIMCITY

*SimCity* dominated the simulation market. For over two decades, Will Wright's city-building series would go from strength to strength, until a curious miss-step from developer Maxis in 2013 all but shut it down. That opened a gap in the market and so *Cities: Skylines* appeared, a spiritual successor that expanded on the basic concept to encompass a full-scale city-sim game; *Skylines* is truly wonderful, but it also owes a huge debt to the innovations and successes made by *SimCity* in its earliest years.



## BALDUR'S GATE

Legendary BioWare RPG *Baldur's Gate* established a template for the fantasy RPG back in 1998 that many developers are still using and abusing to this very day – be it overtly or in spirit. In fact, the series spawned two direct spiritual successors that fit the mould, Obsidian's *Pillars Of Eternity* and BioWare's own *Dragon Age: Origins*. Both are fantastic in their own right; both owe a debt to the smart world-building, mission structure and framework of this classic.

# THE 

# ARCTIS PRO + GAMEDAC

MANUFACTURER: **STEELSERIES** PRICE: **£249.99**

**Steelseries has done it again, delivering another fantastic upgrade on its Arctis series, this time with high-end functionality and price tag to match.** But this is very much a case of getting what you pay for with the kind of audio performance, comfort and design that anyone who considers themselves to be an audio expert would appreciate.

Let's start with the significant new addition to the package, the GameDAC digital-to-analog convertor. It's an excellent little piece of kit, nicely designed and easy to use. It gives you higher-resolution, less compressed audio when you play, as well as offering you access to a wide range of customisation options. To navigate its bright and clear OLED screen you just need to use the volume knob on the device. Its inclusion means that this headset is best used with a desktop setup, so it leans to PC gaming over consoles, but it works great with PS4 as well.

Design wise this is everything we've come to expect from the Arctis range, with clean lines, a gorgeous matte black finish and very simple layout. In fact, this headset is even clearer and cooler than before, with an aluminium headband replacing the plastic of the Arctis 3 and the strap coming in a default black rather than the rather snazzy ski-goggle inspired headbands of old.

While comfort was never much of an issue in the past, we'd hazard to suggest that the Arctis Pro is actually even more comfortable thanks to the combination of the new headband elements and how they now wrap around each other, giving you a much firmer hold across your head. Meanwhile, the ear cushions remains among the most comfortable around.

And the audio, whether running through the DAC or not, remains absolutely top notch. As we say, this may carry a hefty price tag, but it packs a hefty punch too, and we would suggest you're getting a lot for your money.

**VERDICT 9/10**

The GameDAC controller gives you far greater control of your audio experience on the fly that the volume alone could give you, including EQ settings that can offer real customisation between games.

The simple design of the Steelseries Arctis range remains impressive, and is coupled with immense comfort for the perfect blend of style and functionality.

# GAMING CLOTHING




## PAC-MAN HIGH SCORE

Thinkgeek has a cool new range of retro arcade-inspired shirts to offer and high among them is the *Pac-Man* number. This design screams Eighties to us, and has a nice weathered look to the printing as well.
**www.thinkgeek.com**




## ATARI NEON

Ah, the all-powerful Atari. If only that were still the case. But we can continue to live in an age of Atari dominance with this fine shirt design that wouldn't look out of place on an extra in *Blade Runner 2049*.
**www.thinkgeek.com**




## TEMPEST NEON GLOW

Wow, a *Tempest* shirt. If you ask us wearing something like this seems pretty hardcore. Not a lot of big *Tempest* heads out there these days and we would say that's a shame. It's an essential arcade experience.
**www.thinkgeek.com**

# GEAR ROUNDUP

## WIRED ICONIC CONTROLLER

PRICE: **£24.99**

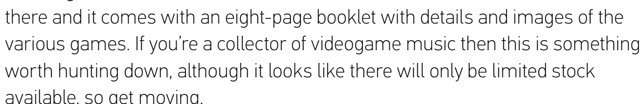
This controller is part of a range of character gamepads from PowerA released for the Nintendo Switch, and they look excellent. While we'll always pick a wireless controller first, having a wired backup is never a bad idea and the designs on this range are particularly well done. The detail in the background artwork on this one is very good, but that's true across the range, and the small metallic touches are very cool. We'd say these look like a smart and relatively cheap option for getting some extra pro gamepads around the house.
**WWW.GAME.CO.UK**

## NAMCO MUSEUM: GREATEST HITS VINYL LP

PRICE: **$9.99 EACH**



This new vinyl pressing from Spacelab9 features 19 classic tracks from the great and good of Namco's arcade past with a 'pixel explosion' vinyl design. There's music from *Dig Dug, Galaga, Pac-Man, New Rally X, Rolling Thunder* and more on there and it comes with an eight-page booklet with details and images of the various games. If you're a collector of videogame music then this is something worth hunting down, although it looks like there will only be limited stock available, so get moving.
**WWW.THINKGEEK.COM**






## DATEL GO-TCHA LED-TOUCH-WRISTBAND FOR POKÉMON GO

PRICE: **£28.20**

Remember the Pokémon Go Plus wristbands from when *Pokémon Go* was launched? Well, these third party wristband offer all of the same functionality for helping you hunt down Pokémon in *Pokémon Go* along with a bunch of added features. For instance, you can set the wristband to Auto Catch mode so that you don't need to pull out your phone when a Pokémon is near to stand a chance of grabbing it. Likewise, it can help you collect items from Poké Stops, all on its convenient touch screen.
**WWW.AMAZON.CO.UK**





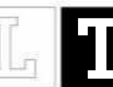
## VENOM POWER PACK AND STAND

PRICE: **£29.99**

Making sure you have enough charge for your Switch when you're on the move is essential and while the battery of the console isn't terrible, a little extra boost can go a long way. Well, Venom is bringing a little more than just a boost with this 2-in-1 power bank and stand with its 10,000 mAh battery. It clips to the Switch really nicely, doesn't make it too bulky, and should give you several more hours of gaming time depending on the demands of the game. It doesn't cost the Earth either, but then you could get it for free with a **games™** subscription. Check out page 38 for details.
**WWW.GAME.CO.UK**








# BIOSHOCK: FROM RAPTURE TO COLUMBIA

PUBLISHER: **THIRD EDITIONS**



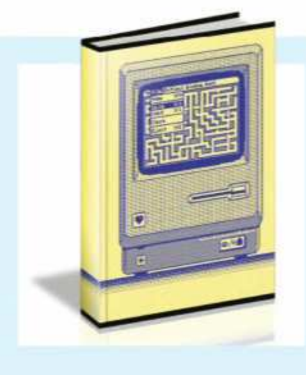

**There are few games that can stand up to a purely text-driven dissection of their contribution to gaming, but BioShock is unquestionably one of them.** While the political, philosophical and/or sociological aspects of Irrational Games' first-person experience could probably fuel several discussions on their own, there's just as much to explore in the way Ken Levine and his team approach mechanics, pacing and narrative. That's exactly what Nicolas Courcier, Raphaël Lucas and Mehdi El Kanafi have done with this book, which breaks down into two parts; the first looking mostly at *BioShock* and the echoes of the game into *BioShock 2*, and the second focusing on the world of Columbus in *BioShock Infinite*.

As we've hinted, fans of screenshots and artwork in their videogame retrospectives should probably look elsewhere for their fix as this isn't going to be it. Instead, you get a book that explores the back story and influences that helped to shape the direction that BioShock went, such as the contribution of Looking Glass as a studio that helped to birth the concept of a narratively-driven first-person experience and more specifically discussing titles like *Deus Ex*, *Thief* and *System Shock 2*, as well as *Ultima Underworld*.

And then comes the thorough and painstaking analysis of the BioShock games themselves. The love and appreciation of the series is clear as all of the key elements are given attention and time to be dissected. Ultimately, as the book helps to reveal through its structure, it's the combination of all of these smaller elements that made the BioShock games what they were. A very interesting read for hardcore fans and genre appreciators to dig into.

**www.thirdeditions.com**

VERDICT 8/10



## THE SECRET HISTORY OF MAC GAMING

It's a little discussed area of videogame history, but this book from Richard Moss looks into the history of gaming on Macintosh and how the home computer may have influenced the current state of PC gaming in its many forms. What are the through lines? You'll have to read this book to find out.

**www.forbiddenplanet.com**




## THE CRASH BANDICOOT FILES

This reprint of Naughty Dog's developer bible gives you a unique insight into the making of one of PlayStation's most iconic and popular heroes. See how Crash evolved, how the team came up with the world and so much more. This seems like an essential Bandicoot fan purchase.

**www.darkhorse.com**




## HEARTHSTONE: INNKEEPER'S TAVERN COOKBOOK

The Azeroth cooking range continues to grow, this time turning its attention to the foodstuff for hungry *Hearthstone* players. Food pairings and dietary tips are all included in this fun expansion on the *World Of Warcraft* cookbook.

**www.titanbooks.com**





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**Printed by** William Gibbons, 28 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13, 3XT

**Distributed by** Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

**ISSN 1478-5889**








Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

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